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# **A Feminist Multidimensional Account of Autonomy**

**Ji-Young Lee**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts**

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## **Abstract**

My thesis defends a multidimensional account of personal autonomy. The dissertation is in two parts. In the first part, I claim that autonomy is best conceptualised as a multidimensional framework composed of several interrelated dimensions or elements. These elements include self-determination, self-governance, self-authorisation, and social recognition. My view is that this account can serve as a nuanced framework that will help us make sense of difficult cases of autonomy, as well as clashing feminist intuitions over autonomy. In the second part, I offer comparative analyses of my own view in relation to a range of influential, unidimensional feminist autonomy theories. These include the normative competence view, the dialogical view, and the social-relational view. In so doing, I track aspects of the literature that have informed my account. At the same time, I highlight the limitations of these competing views by stating how my own account is able to enhance the insights contained in these views. Critically evaluating these accounts in tandem with my own account will thus bring into sharp focus why I am motivated to advance a multidimensional conception of autonomy, and how my conception improves on existing frameworks. Ultimately, I hope to have demonstrated that my multidimensional view is a robust account of autonomy that satisfies major feminist interests and meaningfully competes with other feminist accounts of autonomy.



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### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE:.....





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## Introduction

My thesis aims to provide a feminist relational account of personal autonomy. I carry out this aim by proposing a ‘hybrid’ multidimensional theory of autonomy, which incorporates individual and relational factors. The core of my view is that autonomy is constituted by several qualitative interrelated dimensions, which include *self-determination*, *self-governance*, *self-authorization*, and *social recognition*, and quantitative factors, which are *temporality* and *pervasiveness*. I will demonstrate that my view provides a substantive answer to the nature of autonomy itself. Moreover, I show that it is uniquely equipped to handle difficult and puzzling questions about autonomy, including the question of the compatibility between autonomy and oppression – a principal concern in the feminist literature on autonomy.

My interest in the topic is motivated by a puzzle generated by the fact that many existing accounts happen to be diverging *unidimensional* theories catering to specific intuitions about autonomy. The tendency toward unidimensional foci, I think, elicits the impression that debate on personal autonomy in philosophy is typified by tension between rival views. I will mention two scholars I look at in my thesis as examples. Natalie Stoljar’s framework is concerned with the intuition that autonomy is incompatible with the psychological internalization of false and oppressive norms, whereas Marina Oshana’s account is focused on the intuition that autonomy is incompatible with having a social standing that disallows *de facto* control. *Both* scholars are sceptical of the intuitions that motivate *procedural* accounts of autonomy, on which agents can be viewed as autonomous *in spite of* oppressive norms and social standing, so long as the integrity of the agents’ motivational structures with respect to their decision-making remain intact. For Stoljar, the suspicion arises from the failure of procedural accounts to consider the *values* of the content implicated in decision-making; for Oshana, procedural accounts are mistaken for their sole focus on individual psychological states, which fail to denote the actual social standing one has in the world. Already, we have here several, possibly equally compelling, intuitions about what autonomy involves that pull us in different directions. How do we go about assessing which of these accounts give us the most plausible or correct answer?

My perspective is that many of these seemingly dissimilar intuitions are not in fact independent and unrelated concerns. Rather, I take these purportedly discordant intuitions to be giving us insight into *different* parts, or aspects, about autonomy. That is, many competing accounts of autonomy seem to capture one part or aspect about the same *concept*. Part of my project, then, is to take these seemingly disparate intuitions as mutually inclusive insights with potential to be accommodated by a multidimensional account of autonomy, which as a conceptual framework is able to unify divergent notions of the term ‘autonomy’ under one account. A distinctive advantage in formulating autonomy in this way, I believe, is that I am able to offer a framework that converges and satisfies various *feminist* intuitions and interests, making my account one that can meaningfully compete with existing feminist construals of autonomy.

The dissertation is in two parts. In the first part, comprised of four chapters, I lay the foundations of my theory of autonomy. My first chapter, ‘The Puzzle of Autonomy: Analysing Hard Cases’, is a practical exercise of my basic view. I make use of various ‘hard’ cases of autonomy – that is, cases where autonomy is ambiguous or difficult to discern – to draw out conflicting intuitions. These cases are: The Whistle-Blower, The Elective Amputee, The Female Ascetic, and the Marginalized Minority. These cases are meant to impute the controversial and mixed intuitions of autonomy that arise which would present difficulties in analysis without a multidimensional concept of autonomy. Because my proposal is a multidimensional approach, I can pinpoint and navigate the issues relevant for autonomy in each case, and offer a nuanced and explanatorily satisfying analysis of exactly why and how one is or is not autonomous. My hope is that this exercise will hint at the practical import of my account as one that could be applied to many different cases. From Part Two, we will see that my account is able to explain cases of feminist interest, like cases of gendered oppression.

My next chapter, ‘Commitments for a Contemporary Feminist Theory of Autonomy’, gives an overview of the ongoing debate in the feminist literature regarding the value and plausibility of autonomy as a concept. I argue in favor of adopting autonomy as a concept for feminist purposes by attesting to five of its values, namely, their moral, political, emancipatory, empirical, and intrinsic value. I then sketch out a more critical feminist view of autonomy by outlining the standard feminist critique, which challenges the precedence of autonomy as a cultural and philosophical ideal. My view, however, is that adopting a

relational perspective of autonomy will be able to help us rehabilitate the more unsavory connotations attached to the concept. Furthermore, I suggest that we adopt four feminist commitments that taken together serve as a blueprint for constructing an autonomy theory. The first is the content-analysis condition, on which the imperative for autonomy theories to analyze the relationship between autonomy and oppression is consolidated as a theoretical desideratum. The other three conditions are broadly categorized as instances of anti-perfectionist requirements: moral neutrality, sociability, and inclusivity. I take these feminist commitments to set a standard for feminist-minded accounts of autonomy. This standard can be referenced as a kind of test against which the appeal of various feminist accounts – including my own – can be measured.

In the third chapter, ‘Multidimensional Approaches to Autonomy: Killmister and Mackenzie’, I consider two scholars who have conceptualized autonomy in a multidimensional way. Suzy Killmister’s four-dimensional approach is a sophisticated and detailed theory about self-governance, and her account includes self-definition, self-realization, self-unification, and self-constitution as conditions of autonomy. Killmister takes her view to be able to address the puzzle I made brief mention of in earlier paragraphs, adjudicating between different intuitions of autonomy as well as having application in related discussions (e.g. debates about paternalism, moral responsibility, and consent). Catriona Mackenzie’s three-dimensional analysis, which includes self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization, is another multidimensional view, but one that is more explicitly ‘relational’. Although Mackenzie’s view is not as detailed as Killmister’s account, I argue that the structure of Mackenzie’s view is preferable to Killmister’s, because the three-dimensional analysis is both explicitly relational and considers both individual and social factors as relevant for autonomy. As such, I consider Mackenzie’s view a ‘hybrid’ approach. Because Mackenzie’s view has this hybrid quality, it opens up a way to discuss the more normative questions that concern autonomy, such as the impact of social provisions on autonomy. In comparing these accounts on their different merits, I am able to justify why I find Mackenzie’s approach preferable. This will explain why I subsume much of Mackenzie’s dimensions into my own framework of autonomy, which I develop in the chapter following.

Having explained the structural advantages of Catriona Mackenzie’s view in Chapter Three, I develop my own view more fully in Chapter Four: ‘A Hybrid Multidimensional



Approach to Autonomy'. Following Mackenzie, I propose that autonomy is constituted by self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization, but I also add social recognition as a separate category, whereas for Mackenzie social recognition was taken to fall under the dimension of self-authorization. In this chapter, I work through the more problematic or underdeveloped parts of Mackenzie's theory, and lay out the bulk of my own view, which will build and extend on Mackenzie's account. By the end of this chapter, which concludes Part One of my thesis, it should be clear that I endorse a 'hybrid' multidimensional view of autonomy amenable to feminist interests.

In Part Two, which is comprised of three different chapters, I consider a range of mostly unidimensional feminist theories. Specifically, I consider the normative competence view, the dialogical view, and the social-relational view of autonomy in tandem with my own account. Critically assessing these different approaches will allow me to engage more directly with feminist literature on the topic of autonomy, and track some of the insights in it that have informed my own theory. At the same time, the comparative analysis I carry out will allow me to highlight some of the limitations of these unidimensional views, and demonstrate that my account is well placed to take care of the issues that arise. My hope is that this will bolster my defence of the multidimensional frame as a preferable conceptualization of autonomy, and show that it improves on existing feminist frameworks.

Chapter Five, 'Autonomy and Normative Competence', covers Natalie Stoljar's strongly substantive account of autonomy based on normative competence. Stoljar's account states that it is necessary that the agent be able to criticize courses of action by relevant normative standards to be autonomous; this involves true beliefs, and the ability to reflect critically on one's choices. On her view, persons whose choices are grounded in false and oppressive norms lack normative competence, and thus qualify as non-autonomous. While her account highlights a significant 'feminist intuition' – the intuition that agents who internalize their oppression cannot be autonomous – her view would fail to distinguish between the oppressors and the oppressed, because the account is solely interested in normative competence. My more multifaceted view of autonomy is able to account for this problem while also being able to address Stoljar's feminist intuition.

In Chapter Six, 'Dialogical Autonomy', I overview Andrea Westlund's idea of dialogical autonomy. On the dialogical account, it is necessary for autonomous agents to have

a disposition for self-responsibility, expressed as dialogical answerability. In contrast to Stoljar's account explored in the previous chapter, Westlund conceptualizes the dialogical account as a constitutively relational, yet 'content-neutral', account. The idea of self-responsibility holds much promise as a way to gain insight into the agent's own perspective, granting us epistemic access to the rationales that underlie individual decision-making. As such, self-responsibility not only constitutes part of autonomy, but also helps us assess in a practical sense what is going on in the agent's decision-making process. However, as a standalone condition the idea of self-responsibility is of mixed success when it comes to analysing hard cases. I posit that my own account, which subsumes the idea of self-responsibility as *part* of a more variegated multidimensional framework, has greater success in explaining difficult cases that the dialogical view by itself is unable to do.

Finally, Chapter Seven, 'Social-Relational Autonomy', is about Marina Oshana's social-relational account of autonomy. On her account, autonomy is a matter of the *de facto* control the agent has over his or her life, which can only be determined 'externally'. She looks at four case studies – the Voluntary Slave, the Subservient Woman, the Conscientious Objector, and the Monk – to support the usefulness of her framework in explaining their autonomous status. Unlike Stoljar's psychological account, Oshana departs from 'internalist' views of autonomy by claiming that they are unable to account for socially based detriments to autonomy. And unlike Westlund's dialogical view, Oshana is less accommodating of the individual perspective, making hers a 'substantive' rather than 'content-neutral' externalist view of autonomy. And although Oshana does include more internal conditions of autonomy (e.g. critical reflection), my concern is that her framework is in effect rather radically relational, which generates a host of problems. I contend that these problems can be alleviated by recourse to a more 'hybrid' approach to autonomy like my own view.

By the end of Part Two, it should be clear that my account meaningfully compete with other feminist accounts of autonomy. While the normative competence view, the dialogical view, and the social-relational view represent a range of important feminist contributions to autonomy theory, their weaknesses arise from their emphasis on specific unitary conditions. My multidimensional theory, which is able to include many of the valuable features gleaned from these feminist accounts under one framework, is thereby better placed to be an account of practical and explanatory import.

Overall, I hope to have shown that my account is of great interest as a general theory of autonomy, with practical potential in the analysis of many hard cases. But I also hope it is clear that it is amenable to feminist interests and is able to engage substantively with competing feminist theories of autonomy.

# 1

## The Puzzle of Autonomy: Analysing Hard Cases

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I demonstrate that autonomy is best conceptualized as a multidimensional concept. I model my view after Catriona Mackenzie's multidimensional analysis of autonomy. Mackenzie's view is that ongoing disputes in the literature over how autonomy should be understood results from the fact that there are different uses and conceptions of autonomy which operate "for different purposes in different social and normative contexts"<sup>1</sup>. According to Mackenzie, it is by identifying the various distinct but 'causally interdependent' elements of autonomy that we can make sense of why "different conceptions arise from different normative theoretical frameworks and from different value orientations and political commitments"<sup>2</sup>. The influence I draw from Mackenzie's view will be covered in subsequent chapters (Chapters Three and Four); for now, I will point out that my own view subsumes three dimensions of autonomy that Mackenzie proposes as elements of autonomy: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. In addition to these dimensions, my account adds a separate category of social recognition as a dimension of autonomy.

Because I take the concept of autonomy to be multiply constituted by these separate but interrelated elements, I am able to capture and explain divergent intuitions regarding autonomy. Furthermore, my multidimensional account holds solid explanatory potential for the analysis of *hard cases* of autonomy, which I take as the principal feat, or test, against which the desirability of an account of autonomy may be assessed.

Upon giving a brief summary of the various parts I propose as elements of autonomy, I will survey a series of hard cases of autonomy. I draw on a collection of examples – the Whistle-Blower, The Elective Amputee, The Female Ascetic, and the Marginalized Minority – to capture the complex ways that autonomy can be analysed. My analysis of these hard

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<sup>1</sup> Catriona Mackenzie, 'Three Dimensions of Autonomy' in *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*, ed. By Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15-56, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

cases will hopefully bring to light how an account of autonomy that is sufficiently multidimensional will be able to capture their nuances and difficulties.

## 1.2 Elements of autonomy

The idea of an autonomous person is familiar enough to us in every-day usage. The type of character that tends to spring to mind are persons we perceive as being self-defined or self-created. It seems intuitively obvious that ideas about defining and constituting oneself is what is meant by autonomy. Yet adages about *being one's own person* do not do much to demystify exactly how a person can have autonomy. As J. David Velleman points out, these ideas about self-constitution sound "...not just magical but paradoxical, as if the rabbit could go solo and pull himself out of the hat"<sup>3</sup>.

In my view, it is the more borderline cases of autonomy – *hard cases* – that will help us confront questions about what autonomy *is*. What hard cases help elicit are the wide-ranging possibilities of ways that a person can be autonomous, or fail to be autonomous. In my view, the reason why hard cases evoke divergent intuitions about autonomy is because they capture ways that different *elements* constitutive of autonomy are either imperfectly expressed, or missing. Below, I will outline a very basic account of what I take the elements constitutive of autonomy to be: they are four broad categories, which are *self-determination*, *self-governance*, *self-authorization*, and *social recognition*. As I've mentioned, I take these concepts from Catriona Mackenzie's multidimensional view of autonomy. A more exhaustive account of her view, and these dimensions, are detailed in later chapters (Chapter Three and Chapter Four), but for this chapter a basic account will give us an idea of the diverse ways we can think about autonomy.

*Self-determination* can be thought of as split into *freedom* and *opportunity* conditions. Freedom can be of a negative type, as in freedom *from* paternalism or undue interference. It can also be positive, as in the sense of having certain substantive rights and political liberties accorded to one. Opportunity conditions, like positive freedom, is a substantive notion with normative value; opportunities provide and make accessible to agents an adequate range of meaningful choices and options.

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<sup>3</sup> J. David Velleman, 'The Self as Narrator', in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 56-76, p. 56.

*Self-governance* is comprised of *authenticity* and *competency* conditions. Authenticity conditions set the defining standard by which we might locate the ‘individual’ in any instance of decision-making. To give an example, we might say that a certain mode of critical reflection reveal the agent’s most true self (as when one deliberates about what to do), thereby making it an authenticity condition. Whatever the authenticity conditions are based on, they all aim at tracking the individual ‘self’ that underlies and speaks for each instance of decision-making. As such, authenticity conditions can be thought of as a localized concept concerned with individual instances of decision-making and their attributability to the agent in question. Competency conditions can range from trivially relevant or highly relevant to self-governance. Some kinds of competencies, like self-knowledge and critical thinking skills, may well be necessary abilities that make authentic deliberation possible. Other kinds, which are more generalized– for example, memory and imagination – are related to autonomy inasmuch as they contribute to one’s autonomy overall. Memory and imagination as competencies on their own may not be particularly related to self-governance, but cases where memory and imagination are utilized for authentic deliberation would be.

*Self-authorization* involves *self-responsibility* as well as *self-regard*. Self-responsibility is about having the disposition to hold oneself answerable for one’s conduct. This sense of accountability may, for instance, involve engaging in dialogical exchange with others and being responsive to critical feedback regarding their decisions. Self-regard denotes certain pro-attitudes that relate to the ability to treat oneself in a normatively appropriate fashion. There are a range of self-regarding attitudes that may be relevant for autonomy, but for now I will focus on two kinds. The first kind of ‘recognition’ self-respect that I take to be essential to self-authorization is the idea of respecting oneself as an agent with equal moral standing. This kind of self-respect centers on one’s status worth, which derives from “having dignity and moral status just in virtue of being a person”<sup>4</sup>, to follow a Kantian idea of dignity. The next kind of recognition self-respect has more to do with treating oneself as an agent with self-governing and self-authorizing potential. This view is more inclusive than the first: in the literature, self-respect has been discussed as an “effective capacity to develop and

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<sup>4</sup> Robin S. Dillon, "Respect", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/respect/>>

pursue one's own conception of a worthwhile life"<sup>5</sup>, a sense of oneself "as capable of making judgments"<sup>6</sup>, and living in accordance with a "normative self-conception"<sup>7</sup>. These discussions are captured under my definition of the second kind of recognition self-respect. Now both senses, I think, can plausibly be called self-respect, and are related to self-authorization and autonomy by having to do with the "attunement of an individual's identity"<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, *social recognition* is a dimension that is tied to all three of the previous dimensions. Social recognition can denote recognition respect from other individual agents, or recognition in a *structural* sense (e.g. the legal status of citizenship). Either way, it pertains to recognition of the status worth of any individual agent from the outside-in. In a more general sense, social recognition is attached to norms, customs, traditions, and permissions that are effective in a society. The way social recognition convenes on self-determination is by making freedom conditions (e.g. substantive freedom) and opportunity conditions *efficacious*. For example, someone who is presented with a career opportunity for which they are eligible, but whose uptake of that opportunity is thwarted by an unconscious racial bias from recruiters, will be denied equality of opportunity in this social sense. Hence, such an agent lacks social recognition with respect to this opportunity.

Social recognition also convenes on self-governance by acting as a normative stamp of approval or disapproval that moderates any interpretation of the authenticity and competence. Say, for instance, that the standard in place for authenticity was something like critical reflection. Social recognition affects the normative status of authentically reflected choices – we judge someone who exercises critical reflection with respect to oppressive social norms very differently from someone who exercises it with respect to non-oppressive social norms. It may well be that in cases where normative approval of certain types of preferences are very low, the dimension of social recognition is effective in discounting such preferences even where self-governance is attributable.

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, 'Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice', in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.127-149, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Marian A. Verkerk, 'The care perspective and autonomy', *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 4 (2001), 289-294 (p. 293).

<sup>7</sup> Robin S. Dillon, "Respect", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/respect/>>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, social recognition very strongly convenes on the self-authorization dimension because the latter involves attitudes that essentially require social uptake. I must depend on others, to an extent, to not underrate or deny me my self-respect, in order for my own self-respecting attitudes to be uncompromised. Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth claim, for instance, that individuals are vulnerable to be diminished in self-respect by “subordination, marginalization, and exclusion”<sup>9</sup>, because these are ways that individuals are denied “the social standing of legitimate co-legislators”<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, in order to have self-responsibility I would need interlocutors to recognize and understand my rationales for abiding by the choices I make – and this, too, counts as a kind of social recognition.

It should be noted that individuals who do not have full autonomy – which I take to be the simultaneous fulfilment of the four interrelated dimensions – are not necessarily non-autonomous. It is possible for persons to have partial autonomy, even if they do not have full autonomy. Autonomy admits of degrees, and it is possible to appraise autonomy in any one of the four-dimensional senses. No two autonomous persons are necessarily autonomous in the same way, or to the same degree, even if their decisions and objectives look similar, because there are many ways that the elements of their autonomy could differ. The basic outline above should give us a base of a conceptual frame that I will reference as I discuss the difficult cases of autonomy in the following section.

### **1.3 Ascribing hard cases of autonomy**

As I go through each hard case, I will entertain several standpoints from which we might regard the question of autonomy. It should become apparent that different elements of autonomy can manifest in diverse, complicated, unexpected, and incomplete ways, and that no two autonomous persons are necessarily autonomous in the same way in spite of similarities across decision types. Though I will not attempt to reach a final or perfect adjudication of all competing intuitions elicited in the cases below, my analyses of them will serve to anticipate the appeal of my multidimensional account as a method of inquiring into autonomy.

#### **1.3.1 The Whistle-Blower**

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson and Honneth, p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



Take the example of the Whistle-Blower. A whistle-blower is someone who exposes the wrongdoings or corruption of the organizations they work for. Whistle-blowing in many cases incur huge personal losses, as recounted by one whistle-blower, John Brown:

“I didn’t just lose my job. I lost my house, and then I lost my family. I don’t even see my kids anymore...I spent \$50,000 to have my day in court, only it was more like my minute in court. After five years of waiting to get to court, the judge said I didn’t have standing to sue... You know what I do now? I deliver pizza. Me, a licensed professional engineer. The engineers association, they just wished me luck, said they admired someone who stood up for his beliefs... So, I think I was crazy to blow the whistle. Only I don’t think I ever had a choice. It was speak up or stroke out.”<sup>11</sup>

How autonomous is the whistle-blower? To contrive a determination, we need to consider several tensions concurrent in this case relevant to autonomy. For one, we have the unresolved tension between integrity and prudence, both of which seem to relate to autonomy in some way. Let us provisionally take integrity to be something like Bernard Williams’ sense of identity-conferring agency. Integrity in this sense presides over “a class of projects to which the individual is particularly committed”<sup>12</sup>. It is “to be something more than a conduit for the furtherance of others’ initiatives”<sup>13</sup>. If whistle-blowing is a project to which the agent is specially committed, it seems to indicate – to that extent – some self-governed principle expressive of autonomy. It seems to be the case generally that integrity is a good thing for an agent to have, and that it expresses authenticity. The ‘admiration’ accorded to Brown by the engineer’s association (notwithstanding their lack of support for Brown) is not only related to the *moral* praiseworthiness of Brown’s decision, but to the axiological aspect of Brown’s resolute fidelity to his self-chosen commitments. As John Christman points out, any appraisal of a person’s integrity or moral status will rely “on the presumption that her preferences and values are in some important sense her own”<sup>14</sup>. Taking it for granted that this

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<sup>11</sup> C. Fred Alford, *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organizational Power* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2001) p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> John Harris, ‘Williams on Negative Responsibility and Integrity’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 24 (1974), 265-273 (p. 266).

<sup>13</sup> Sophie Grace Chappell and Nicholas Smyth, "Bernard Williams", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/williams-bernard/>

<sup>14</sup> John Christman, ‘Autonomy and Personal History’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 21 (1991), 1-24 (p. 1).

sort of integrity does express a commitment that counts as one's own (that is, it is *self-governing*), it looks like we have a way to ascribe some autonomy to the whistle-blower.

On the other hand, we might wonder if whistle-blowing as an expression of integrity does not happen to violate several senses of prudence important for a different part of autonomy. If we take matters of prudence to be about what it is good *for* a person to do – that is, what would benefit a person or be in their interest – there is an obvious sense in which the whistle-blower errs. Exposing corruption may be a morally good thing to do, but it is not clear that it is good *for* the whistle-blower who suffers the repercussions following that choice. Similarly, if we think about prudence in the sense of a practical deliberative consideration about the avoidance of events that affect long-term prosperity – that is, the decision-maker's ability “to satisfy their future interests”<sup>15</sup> – the whistle-blower is also disadvantaged. Now while I am not claiming that prudence necessarily attends autonomy, it is clear that it is contingently true of this case that the material pitfalls of whistle-blowing – losing one's job, one's house, being financially worse off – curtail freedoms and opportunities relevant to self-determination and hamper the realization of self-governed principles that require these goods to be accessible to the agent. For instance, whistle-blowers often get ‘blacklisted’, which describes the phenomenon whereby employers turn away whistle-blowers due to their being seen as a “disloyal employee and a potential liability”<sup>16</sup>. As such, the opportunities available to them are significantly reduced, which in turn further entrench the material losses suffered as a result of the choice. Thus, to the extent that the lack of prudence attributable to this case betokens a failure to insulate the aforementioned dimensions of autonomy, the whistle-blower is hampered in autonomy.

So we have located integrity as an important feature of this case, which pulls us in a positive direction with respect to our intuitions about autonomy; but we also have a notion of prudence as important for autonomy, and this seems to pull our intuitions in a negative direction. How then should we frame and adjudge autonomy? One option we have is to see if it is possible to determine autonomy by focusing one dimension of autonomy as a satisfactory deciding factor. For instance, we could say that the whistle-blower is autonomous because

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<sup>15</sup> Tobey K. Scharding, ‘Imprudence and Immorality: A Kantian Approach to the Ethics of Financial Risk’, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 25 (2015), 243–265 (p. 251).

<sup>16</sup> Frederick D. Lipman, *Whistleblowers: Incentives, Disincentives, and Protection Strategies* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 58.

they are self-authorizing. That is, they exhibit self-respect and a sense of responsibility over their choice. On this line of thought, the clash between integrity and prudence can be settled because we can bracket the utilitarian considerations of prudence by stating that a whistleblower was self-authorized in their decision-making despite *pro-tanto* reasons not to blow the whistle. We might think that the values one holds for which one respects oneself, and for which one holds oneself to account most deeply, trumps the losses of other goods that affect the status of one's autonomy. That is, we can treat self-authorized – rather than prudential – decision-making as normatively authoritative with respect to autonomy.

The problem is, however, that even if we treat other considerations as defeasible, what we have proposed as a non-defeasible dimension may not be perfectly expressed in the first place. Thus, singling out some dominant determinate consideration – that is, treating autonomy as a unidimensional concept – does not seem any more helpful in the adjudication of our divergent intuitions. While a more focalized view of autonomy will put us on an easier track to reach a determination *about* autonomy, such an approach would incur the cost of both neglecting to explain the presence of competing intuitions, and of oversimplifying the question of how someone is autonomous. In my view, it would be reasonable to attend to the competing intuitions at hand with a multidimensional perspective – I believe doing so would be to acknowledge the wide-ranging facets and lenses by which autonomy can be appraised.

Consider again the idea of integrity as expressive of self-governing and self-authorizing commitments, since this is the feature of the case we have isolated as carrying a positive relation to autonomy earlier this section. One scholar, C. Fred Alford, finds that many articles about whistleblowing tend to overemphasize the aspect of whistle-blowers being “noble people with strong morals who stand up for what is true and just”<sup>17</sup>, without accounting for the real dilemmas these individuals face. He notes that whistle-blowers often tell their stories within a frame of ‘choiceless choice’. This is the sense that one could not live with oneself had they decided not to go through with whistle-blowing. Alford interviewed numerous whistle-blowers over the years, and observed that most of them talk about blowing the whistle as a kind of ‘freedom’, but a freedom that has the “quality of a compulsion, one that can seize a person and not let go until it has destroyed just about everything the whistle-

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<sup>17</sup> Alford, *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organizational Power*, p. 1.

blower values: career, home, family”<sup>18</sup>. This picture of choice seems to suggest that what we have thus far been panegyricizing as ‘integrity’ is in fact a commitment of a tainted or destructive quality. If this is true, we may be justified in exercising a scepticism about whether the commitment to whistle-blow really manifests self-governance or self-authorization, since it seems to act as one that destroys the agent’s *other* self-governing and self-authorizing values.

However, we could analyze this idea of ‘choiceless choice’ in a different way. Take Bernard Williams’ idea of *moral incapacity*, which is a species of incapacity grounded in one’s character or dispositions<sup>19</sup>. The idea is that if some action is unthinkable for an agent, there is a sense in which they cannot do it knowingly<sup>20</sup>. It is possible for one to have a moral incapacity but not realize it<sup>21</sup>. It is often in our deliberation that we come to ‘discover’ that we cannot in fact do something. This incapacity of character is not a technical incapacity since we may still be able to do what we find ‘unthinkable’ under inadvertent circumstances. For instance, one might unwittingly betray a friend by divulging something about them that they did not realize was meant to be kept secret. Had they known they were engaged in an act of disloyalty by so doing, however, they could not do it. Similarly, Harry Frankfurt’s idea of *volitional necessity* relates to constraints on what it is the agent can and cannot do. Necessity denotes what the agent is ‘unwilling to oppose’. For instance, Frankfurt talks about necessities of love as having a ‘categorical’ volitional effect – that is, to love or care about something creates “stable motivational structures”<sup>22</sup> that generate boundaries on one’s conduct. This necessity is implicated in the making of choices and doing of actions that one is “eager or unwilling to perform”<sup>23</sup>. Both the notion of ‘moral incapacity’ for Williams, and that of ‘volitional necessity’ for Frankfurt count as genuine types of incapacities, but are nonetheless not thought to undermine one’s agency<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> C. Fred Alford, ‘Whistleblower narratives: Stuck in Static Time’, *Narrative*, 8 (2000), 279-293 (p. 282).

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Williams, ‘Moral Incapacity’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 93 (1993), 59-70 (p. 60).

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Seidman, ‘Caring and Incapacity’, *Philosophical Studies*, 147 (2010), 301-322 (p. 303).

<sup>21</sup> Craig Taylor, ‘Moral Incapacity’, *Philosophy*, 70 (1995), 273-285 (p. 275).

<sup>22</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, ‘Autonomy, Necessity, and Love’, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Gary Watson, ‘Volitional Necessities’, *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2004), p. 100.

How can irresistible action be compatible with autonomy? According to Frankfurt, one acts autonomously only if one's volitions derive from the "essential character"<sup>25</sup> of one's will. On his view, being in the 'personal grip' of love satisfies this condition. The irresistible quality of whatever it is that moves us need not be incompatible with our autonomy, since they may "move us irresistibly precisely in ways that we are wholeheartedly pleased to endorse"<sup>26</sup>. In this case we do not experience a disparity between what we 'must' do, and how we would prefer to conduct ourselves. As such, it is possible for an irresistible force to not be alien to us. Now if we are convinced that such an account can be a plausible marker of one's 'authentic' character, it is possible to say that whistle-blowing is compatible with self-governance even if it is something one cannot help but do. Even so, it does not seem like we can guarantee self-governance when the whistle-blower expresses that they *could not live with themselves* had they not done so-and-so, which is a rather different attitude to being 'pleased' to wholeheartedly endorse some choice. Nevertheless, I hope the structural similarities between 'choiceless choice' and incapacities of character compatible with agency have shown that our ideas about what counts as self-governing can be nuanced.

I hope this initial run-through of a hard case has shown that difficulties attached to the practical determination of autonomy can be tackled and managed by treating autonomy as analysable through multiple dimensions. Given the information we have so far, we could make a tentative statement about the whistle-blower without having to commit to saying that he either is or is not autonomous. It seems that there are different *ways* they are likely to be autonomous – by being self-governed, for instance – and different ways that they are likely to be failing some dimension of autonomy – like by experiencing diminished self-determination – which overall gives us a mixed verdict. The verdict is further complicated by the fact that attributing self-governance or any of the other dimensions is a controversial process. As such, we have reached a kind of approximation, rather than an exact delineation, about the status of autonomy in the whistle-blower. But this 'mixed' verdict should not trouble us – it still gives us a detailed and nuanced view about what it could mean for one to be autonomous, and the remaining ambiguities signpost us to the questions that have yet to be attended.

### 1.3.2 The Elective Amputee

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<sup>25</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, 'Autonomy, Necessity, and Love', *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

In 1997, A Scottish surgeon named Robert Smith was approached by a man who wanted his healthy lower left leg amputated. It appears that this man wanted the amputation on the grounds that he felt “alienated” from his left foot. Smith ended up carrying out the surgery, and the recipient expressed being satisfied by the outcome; over two years later, he said his life had been ‘transformed for the better’ because of the operation<sup>27</sup>. Two years later, it was reported that Smith carried out a similar procedure on a German retiree. Both these patients had intimated that one of their legs was ‘superfluous’, and that having to live with it made them suffer emotionally<sup>28</sup>.

Several psychiatric explanations have been put forward regarding this desire to have one’s (healthy) limbs amputated. I will refer to one with such desires an ‘elective amputee’ for simplicity’s sake. Below, I survey existing explanations about this condition. One theory is that the individual suffers from Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), where the individual falsely believes that part of their body is diseased or excessively ugly. This condition is framed in terms of the individual suffering from a kind of delusion or misperception about one’s own body, to an extent where the individual is fixated on the ‘false’ belief and is unresponsive to evidence to the contrary<sup>29</sup>. A second explanation is that the desire is related to a sexual compulsion<sup>30</sup>. On this model, the desire for amputation is a type of paraphilia – apotemnophilia<sup>31</sup>. A third explanation – and one that has attracted more favour in recent times – is that the elective amputee experiences a mismatch in their own experience of their body, and the actual structure of their body<sup>32</sup>. This condition is dubbed Bodily Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID).

Two major questions pertinent to autonomy arise here. The first is whether the desire to amputate one’s healthy limbs is self-governing. The next question is about how we should respond to such a request in a normative sense – about whether we have responsibilities to *respect* the elective amputee’s requests to have their healthy limbs amputated or not. To

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<sup>27</sup> Tim Bayne and Neil Levy, ‘Amputees By Choice: Body Integrity Identity Disorder and the Ethics of Amputation’, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 22 (2005), 75-86 (p. 75).

<sup>28</sup> Sabine Müller, ‘Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID)—Is the Amputation of Healthy Limbs Ethically Justified?’, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 9 (2009), 36-43 (p. 36).

<sup>29</sup> Bayne and Levy, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Sedda and Gabriella Bottini, ‘Apotemnophilia, body integrity identity disorder or xenomelia? Psychiatric and neurologic etiologies face each other’, *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 10 (2014), 1255-1265 (p. 1256).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bayne and Levy, p. 76.

evaluate these questions, we will need to invoke the dimensions of self-determination, self-governance, and social recognition.

On the first question, the issue at stake is whether the elective amputee's desires are self-governing. It may be tempting, at first, to take something like rationality as a way of making a judgment on their autonomy. Certainly this is often the way that patient autonomy is treated in the medical realm, as when patient's decisions (e.g. refusal of life-saving treatment) is challenged on grounds of rationality as a facet of mental competence<sup>33</sup>. Some may regard the elective amputee's request as irrational and that therefore it is nixed as an autonomous request, at least if we believe that autonomy (or self-governance) requires a level of rationality. The issue of rationality and its link with autonomy is muddled, however, if we consider the localized nature of the supposed irrationality. These patients, Bayne and Levy claim, are not 'globally' irrational: while their beliefs about their limb might have been arrived at 'irrationally', their deliberations about what to do in light of their beliefs could be construed as rational<sup>34</sup>. We might draw an analogy by comparing them with individuals who want to get cosmetic (rather than reconstructive or corrective) surgery. The idea is that in the case of cosmetic surgery, even as we recognize that one's body image is shaped "under the pressure of non-rational considerations"<sup>35</sup> such as gendered beauty norms, the practice is normalized. We find it permissible, to an extent, for agents to alter their bodies to an idealized body type. Bayne and Levy claim that if this line of thinking is valid in the case of cosmetic surgery, we can draw a parallel to the case of those seeking amputation.

One could argue that this is an imperfect analogy. For one, cosmetic surgery is typically regarded a form of enhancement, whereas amputation is regarded a form of impairment/disfigurement. Peter Brian Barry points out, however, that characterizing the elective amputee's desires this way fails to be sensitive to the experiences that elective amputees have about their condition. Patients who request amputation would *deny* that they become disabled as a result, claiming rather that the amputation would quite literally relieve them of their perceived 'disability'<sup>36</sup>. Besides, it is not only in cases of psychopathology that agents are irrational, since a degree of irrationality is to be expected from the general

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<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Wicks, 'The Right to Life and Autonomy', *The Right to Life and Conflicting Interests* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 179.

<sup>34</sup> Bayne and Levy, p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Brian Barry, 'The Ethics of Voluntary Amputation', *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 26 (2012), 1-18 (p. 1).

population. Moreover, it is not clear how we are meant to demarcate the line at which the ‘disorder’ ends and the ‘person’ begins (take, for instance, ongoing debates about disease vs. choice models of addiction).

Similar dilemmas arise if we think about the issue within philosophical frames of self-governance. To go back to Frankfurt’s view on the compatibility of autonomy and irresistible force, it seems like we might be able to determine that the individual with BIID is self-governing. On the Frankfurtian hierarchical account of desires that count as expressive of the agent’s own will, it must be that a person has a second-order volition with respect to their first-order desires. What it takes for one to have a second-order volition is for one to want a certain desire “to be his will”<sup>37</sup> – that is, one must want to want that a first-order desire be effective for them (that is, one that moves or will move a person “all the way to action”)<sup>38</sup>. In the elective amputee’s case, it seems that even if the desire itself has the quality of irresistibility, it is a desire with respect to which the elective amputee has a consonant second-order volition. Thus, if there is any threat to self-governance in this case it would stem from an external fact; the individual’s second-order volition is frustrated because their desire to amputate finds little opportunity to be realized out in the world, rather than by a discordant motivational structure.

The implication of this determination is that having one’s requests for amputation be thwarted would prevent one from having their self-governed desire be effective, whereas realizing the amputation procedure looks to be the only really satisfactory expression of this authoritative volition. But is this a correct reading of the case? I think an interesting feature of the elective amputee example is that their desires are in principle amenable to Frankfurtian consonance, and this is unlike other sorts of mental conditions where part of the illness *is* to be alienated with respect to second-order volitions. For instance, in the case of depression, it may be that one does suffer a motivational incongruity because one is unable to get out of bed due to feeling hopeless yet wants at the same time to be able to overcome it<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Harry Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68 (1971), 5-20 (p. 10).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Derek Bolton and Natalie Banner, ‘Does mental disorder involve loss of personal autonomy?’ in *Autonomy and Mental Disorder*, ed. By Lubomira Radoilska (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 77-99, p. 88.



But it seems we have other grounds to dispute the contents of desires like the elective amputee's. Aside from the option of simply saying that pathology invalidates the contents of deliberation from counting as autonomous – which I think would be a problematic claim – we can appeal to considerations that motivational hierarchicalism has failed to capture. On something like Steven Weimer's evidence-responsiveness view of autonomy, for instance, hierarchical approaches like Frankfurt's need the addition of an evidence-responsiveness condition. Weimer brings up an example of a cancer patient, Abe, who is anxious to restore his health enough to be able to do the things he enjoys, like travel and exercise. After much deliberation and consultation with his doctor, Abe decides to undergo a particular form of chemotherapy likely to be effective in getting himself well enough to enjoy the activities he likes. However, unanticipated complications make the treatment ineffective, even causing side effects which make Abe more vulnerable to the disease. The doctor then recommends that they cease the treatment and contemplate alternative options. However, Abe is pertinacious with respect to continuing the treatment.

Now Abe satisfies Frankfurtian hierarchical standards in that his desires still cohere with his higher-order commitments. But this doesn't capture the sense that an agent's *responsiveness* to evidence has some bearing on their autonomy. On Weimer's view, the agent needs to be disposed to recognize and respond appropriately to new evidence – which he takes as “that which may indicate the need to make some non-trivial adjustment to a pro-attitude”<sup>40</sup>. Weimer believes this model should have import for persons in medical practice. He says healthcare practitioners need to be aware that patients who are generally competent can still lack autonomy in relation to particular treatment preferences by “...losing the ability and/or disposition to review and revise those preferences in response to new and important information”<sup>41</sup>. It is, he says, pivotal that healthcare providers are “cognizant of the presence or absence of those dispositions”<sup>42</sup>. Now if this process confirms suspicions that the patient lacks autonomy, it opens up significant moral implications which inform the “desirability of rectifying this autonomy deficit...the appropriateness of transferring decision-making

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<sup>40</sup> Steven Weimer, 'Evidence-Responsiveness and the Ongoing Autonomy of Treatment Preferences', *HEC Forum*, 30(2018), 211–233 (p. 221).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

authority... and/or the permissibility of overriding the non-autonomous treatment preference of the patient... ”<sup>43</sup>

Would the elective amputee count as autonomous on Weimer’s view? It looks to me like the elective amputee’s *intransigence* toward to relevant evidence (such as the health risks one undertakes in undergoing an amputating procedure) may well be a way to show them to be deficient in autonomy with respect to amputation-related preferences. And, as Weimer points out, the question of whether we should respect such requests in the active sense – that is, whether such requests have a socially recognized status – does seem to depend on whether they are autonomous.

This takes us to the second question about whether the elective amputee’s request needs to be normatively attended to in any special way. Thus far, we have been looking at this case with special attention to self-governance as a descriptor of authenticity and competence. Let us now consider other senses of autonomy – autonomy as a self-determining right, and as social recognition. Some might say autonomy can be invoked to cover the idea of one’s being “free to make his or her own choices”<sup>44</sup>, and in this case, perhaps even “deduce the right for body modifications”<sup>45</sup>. Now there is a difference between legal responses to cases where a patient consents to treatment and cases where a patient refuses treatment. In short, the view is that patients have a right to refuse treatment, but not to demand it<sup>46</sup>. Thus there is a sense in which one will fall short of autonomy just by lacking self-determining resources by which to carry out self-governing objectives – and the elective amputee’s predicament seems to be an example of this. This ties in with the dimension of social recognition – a big part of why such desires encounter difficulty is because what it is considered reasonable for autonomous agents to adopt as reasons or bases of their decision-making process is inextricably tied to diverging normative conceptions of what it is good or reasonable to do. To the extent that the elective amputee’s desires are not seen as characteristic of decision-making norms that others find acceptable or approvable, they are to that extent also lacking in social recognition.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>44</sup> Wicks, p. 178.

<sup>45</sup> Sabine Müller, ‘Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID)—Is the Amputation of Healthy Limbs Ethically Justified?’, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 9 (2009), 36-43 (p. 36).

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Herring and Jesse Wall, ‘The Nature and Significance of the Right to Bodily Integrity’, *The Cambridge Law Journal*, 76 (2017), 566-588 (p. 567).

Overall, I hope this section has shown that my multidimensional frame is inclusive enough to allow us to explore and test out different theories about what constitutes self-governance (for instance). In this section, we were able to explore Weimer's evidence-responsiveness view as a contrast to the Frankfurtian model. Furthermore, my multidimensional view allowed us to attend to different questions about different parts of autonomy without *conflating* definitions of autonomy. We were also able to address both the descriptive question of how an elective amputee's desires could count as self-governed, as well as the prescriptive question of what kinds of treatments attend the case.

### 1.3.3 The Female Ascetic

In this section, I take inspiration from a body of interdisciplinary literature on female asceticism and anorexia. Gail Corrington, for instance, suggests there are "historical, sociocultural, and psychological continuities"<sup>47</sup> between modern-day anorexia and asceticism practiced by female saints of the early and later Middle Ages. Religious asceticism is commonly associated with subordination to higher spiritual purpose, and modern-day anorexia can also be viewed as a form of asceticism – though it is more commonly framed in terms of it being a psychopathology, a psychiatric disorder centered around the anorexic patient's excessive fear of weight gain<sup>48</sup>. What makes the case of anorexia/asceticism philosophically interesting, as we shall see, is the way that several scholars have conceptualized the experience of anorexics as a *striving* for autonomy and identity (even if these attempts are self-defeating) based on hagiographies and interviews with anorexics. Corrington discusses how "anorexia in young females is especially related to self image, and the drive both for autonomy and acceptance."<sup>49</sup> She says that in early and medieval Christian women it was expressed through asceticism, and in modern women, "with an ideal of leanness that is frequently translated into asceticism"<sup>50</sup>. She continues, "Both groups of women are resisting a male image of women (passive, lustful, with obvious feminine characteristics) in favor of an image men promote for themselves (stringent self-denial; slimness and fitness)."<sup>51</sup> Corrington herself interprets anorexia as a "creative solution...to the

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<sup>47</sup> Gail Corrington, 'Anorexia, Asceticism, and Autonomy: Self-Control as Liberation and Transcendence', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2 (1986), 51-61 (p. 52).

<sup>48</sup> Charlotte Stark, 'All about Anorexia Nervosa', The Mental Health Foundation, <[https://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/19420/all\\_about\\_anorexia.pdf](https://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/19420/all_about_anorexia.pdf)>.

<sup>49</sup> Corrington, p. 53.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

need to take control of one's body out of the hands of society and to exert it oneself"<sup>52</sup>. She observes that patients often see themselves as engaged in a way of attaining discipline and self-control. It enables them to "resist the prevailing values of societies which they do not control, while at the same time making them acceptable to those societies"<sup>53</sup>. Eating and non-eating become symbolic of power and control; the refusal to eat becomes "a refusal of any authority over the body other than one's own"<sup>54</sup>. Similarly, Morag Macsween observes that although "[anorexia] is disguised as a struggle to achieve a socially valued goal – holiness for the medieval, thinness for the modern anorexic – the real struggle is for autonomy, self-sufficiency, and a sense of self"<sup>55</sup>.

Through starvation and fasting, the medieval anorexic was able to desexualize their female body and achieve "an asexual, spiritual union with God (or Christ) – the only form of dominance they would accept"<sup>56</sup>. She transcends the carnal necessities of her bodily form through abstention, becomes pure, and frees herself of sensual and earthly taints. Rudolph M. Bell says "The medieval Italian girl striving for autonomy, not unlike the modern American, British, or Japanese girl faced with the same dilemma, sometimes shifted the contest from an outer world in which she seemingly faced sure defeat to an inner struggle of mastery over herself, over her bodily urges. In this sense the anorexic response is timeless."<sup>57</sup>. His interpretation of the 'holy anorexic' is that she partakes in a form of rebellion against 'passive' Christianity and actively seeks an intimate and physical union with god through her piety. He continues, "Once she convinces herself that her spiritual bridegroom communicates directly with her and she thereby achieves true autonomy, the commands of earthly men become trivial."<sup>58</sup>

While both the holy anorexic and modern anorexic are ascetically motivated to not eat, it seems the modern-day view of anorexia is on more familiar ground when treated in

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Morag Macsween, *Anorexic Bodies: A Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993) p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 55.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

terms of *conformity* to cultural norms that idealize thinness<sup>59</sup> taken to a pathologized extreme. This view cements the condition as restricting autonomy both in the internal sense of self-restraint and self-denial, as well as in the external sense of existing standards of female body aesthetics. It seems that the general medical unanimity regarding the pathology of anorexia is reason enough to give the condition a normative status incompatible with personal autonomy. To that extent it is unlikely that the actual condition of anorexia, and its symptoms, given prevailing expert and non-expert views, would be taken to be compatible with autonomy overall – so it is a condition that lacks social recognition. Still, I think it is interesting that our intuitions related to autonomy regarding the same *type* of action (refusal to eat, in this case) can change depending on the normative social context. In my view, the dimension of social recognition has a lot to do with why the holy anorexic and the modern anorexic might be appraised differently despite very obvious overlaps. That something is socially recognized as an instance of religiosity or of pathology itself can become a lens through which we filter our approval and disapproval about the case – and the context of such lenses are subject to change.

Without necessarily commenting here on whether or not anorexia should be viewed as a type of autonomy-seeking practice, I hope to have shown that my multidimensional view is able to account for nuances between similar choices or decisions by looking at the wider background or social scaffolding of that choice. Determination of autonomy, then, takes seriously the context-dependent rationales that serve to reconfigure narratives of autonomy. By including a social element as a dimension of autonomy, it is possible to explain differences between agents who are internally similarly motivated but vary with respect to how autonomous they are. I hope this also makes a little bit clearer why, for my multidimensional view, I have incorporated both psychological or internal conditions as well as social conditions that externally generate possibilities of autonomy for the agent.

#### **1.3.4 The Marginalized Minority**

Take this excerpt of an interview conducted with a counseling intern in a predominantly white high school:

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<sup>59</sup> Marshall B. Clinard and Robert F. Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behaviour* (Belmont: Wadsworth Cenage Learning, 2011) p. 482.

“I vividly remember the first time I experienced a microaggression from a White student. The student was sent to my office by another counselor to talk about the admissions process at Ivy League schools. The student looked confused when he saw me in the office... I overheard the student ask the other counselor if he had made a mistake because he did not think I could help him. He eventually came back to my office, still looking confused and annoyed, and asked me, “Are *you* the counselor that is supposed to help me with my Ivy League applications?” I was in shock and felt that I needed to prove myself by sharing with him my educational background and credentials. I immediately understood that he was judging my abilities based on my appearance – I was the only dark-skinned counselor in the department.”<sup>60</sup>

Although the interviewee clearly had a place at that school, this experience of microaggression lowered their sense of belonging and minimized their credentials through outside skepticism. In a similar vein, the *internalization* of negative racialized messages may affect how individuals choose to express their capabilities.

The same diminished sense of identity also seems to be generated in cases of so-called “positive” stereotyping. Mei Mei Wong, a student who emigrated to the United States who identifies as Taiwanese and Asian, said this in an interview:

“They [whites] will have stereotypes, like, we're smart - They are so wrong; not everyone is smart. They expect you to be this and that, and when you're not- [shakes her head]. And sometimes you tend to be what they expect you to be, and you just lose your identity- just lose being yourself. Become part of what—what someone else want[s] you to be. And it's really awkward too! When you get bad grades, people look at you really strangely because you are sort of distorting the way they see an Asian. It makes you feel really awkward if you don't fit the stereotype.”<sup>61</sup>

In the case above, Mei Mei is attributed the ‘model minority’ stereotype, which places high expectations on its ‘Asian’ targets. The fact that Mei Mei is treated as an academically

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<sup>60</sup> Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado, Stephany Gallegos Pavan, Teresa I. Baca, ‘Self Hatred, self-doubt, and assimilation in Latina/o communities’ in *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups*, ed. By E.J.R. David (New York: Springer, 2014) p. 119.

<sup>61</sup> Stacey J. Lee, ‘Behind the Model-Minority Stereotype: Voices of High- and Low- Achieving Asian American Students’, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 25 (1994), 413-429 (p. 419).

capable and high-achieving “Asian” means that she has been misrecognized as a model-minority, rather than as a differentiated individual with a unique, less monolithic identity. Despite Mei Mei’s actual success, she often talked about herself as underperforming, and many of her teachers and classmates were privy to her insecurities about failure.

As this example suggests, misrecognition of the individual can generate an obstacle to the practical exercise of autonomy. By misrecognition, I mean specifically a failure to recognize the individual as the individual; as we see in the examples above, it can happen when one is falsely attributed an identity that one cannot live up to, or when one’s actual skills are reduced or denied through “essentialized” outside perceptions of the racialized identity one is seen to occupy. Misrecognition seems to affect autonomy both by outside denial of the agent’s individuality (by dictating from the outside how one can and cannot *be*), and by individual *internalization* of these external ascriptions. In this sense misrecognition is a failure of social recognition and self-authorization.

To this extent, culturally coded ascriptions of the individual’s identity can diminish their autonomy. But there is a different type of misrecognition that can *boost* autonomy. Consider Elizabeth Ben-Ishai’s notion of ‘aspirational recognition’. She frames the practice of aspirational recognition as a way of deliberately endowing autonomous status to individuals even as they lack the “capacities or opportunities necessary to act autonomously”<sup>62</sup>, as a way to nurture these capacities. In her framework, aspirational recognition is a kind of misrecognition, which differs slightly from the way I defined misrecognition above in that it is construed as a *positive*. It is an ‘overly generous’ type of recognition that ascribes individuals autonomous status even where social and psychic constraints are present. She thinks that denying autonomous status constrain individuals not granted that status; ascribing the status, on the other hand, can empower individuals within contexts of oppression or deprivation.

For instance, the narrative that situates sex work as an oppressive profession from which we ought to ‘save’ sex workers can be transformed by ascribing autonomous status to sex workers. She says that “As an expression of this ascription, we may offer resources that

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<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Ben-Ishai, ‘Sexual Politics and Ascriptive Autonomy’, *Politics & Gender*, 6 (2010), 573–600 (p. 576).

can enhance the quality of sex workers' lives — access to sexual health services, meeting spaces, mechanisms for reporting abuses on the job, and so on.”<sup>63</sup> She suggests that autonomy is promoted through this practice of conferral, since it “may both enhance the relations-to-self that foster autonomy (self-esteem, self-respect, etc.) and provide the space within which to organize so that the institutionalized elements of the job that constrain autonomy may be challenged.”<sup>64</sup>

The cases above show us that self-authorization and social recognition are closely interrelated, instantiating a case where social recognition heavily presides over how self-authorized someone is. It seems to us that phenomena like microaggression and other forms of *negative* misrecognition generate issues for self-recognition, but at the same time it seemed that *positive* misrecognition can actually create autonomy as a status worth that entitles the individual to support and resources that would not otherwise be available to them had they not been ‘recognized’ as having a status worthy of autonomy. Thus it seems of principal importance, and a desideratum, that a theory of autonomy seek to bring attention to the aspect of self-authorization, as securing this dimension seems especially important in cases related to oppression. And this, I think, will crucially require social recognition as a key factor that will make self-authorization *effective*.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

The examples above demonstrate several features about the nature of autonomy and its ascription. I believe they show, most of all, that construing autonomy as a multidimensional – rather than unidimensional – concept is a productive way to analyse and inquire into autonomy. I claimed that autonomy is a concept constituted by many interrelated elements, which I’ve claimed fall under four broad categories of self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and social recognition. I covered a range of examples: the Whistle-Blower, the Elective Amputee, the Female Ascetic, and the Marginalized Minority. In all of these cases, we invoked the different *dimensions* of autonomy to make sense of the competing intuitions generated in the cases. As we saw in the case analyses, making an all-things-considered judgment about the various dimensions enabled us to approximate a determination of autonomy overall. I hope this chapter has demonstrated that my

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



multidimensional account of autonomy is practically well-equipped to handle hard cases, thus showing that my account can deal with the complexities of the concept of autonomy. In upcoming Chapters Three and Four, I will further justify why I have structured my multidimensional view in this way, and discuss in greater detail the theoretical underpinnings of my multidimensional view, which is modelled after Catriona Mackenzie's multidimensional analysis.

## 2

# Commitments for a Contemporary Feminist Theory of Autonomy

### 2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the explanatory potential that a multidimensional account of autonomy has for addressing *hard* cases of autonomy. In this chapter, I explore the *feminist* potential for the concept of autonomy. There are several items I want to address in this chapter. My first aim is to attest to autonomy's value for feminist applications by outlining several dimensions of its value: the moral, political, emancipatory, empirical, and intrinsic. I then survey a major feminist critique of autonomy that targets the traditional view of the autonomous agent. I argue that despite this critique, autonomy remains an eminent concept for feminists. This takes us into an ongoing feminist debate about how to theorize autonomy. My view is that this debate can be re-cast to accommodate all the concerns raised if we adhere to a blueprint of conditions which capture the major feminist interests. I hope that my proposal herein will resolve the current gulf in feminist autonomy theory, and that it will set a standard around which I can model my multi-dimensional account of autonomy.

### 2.2 The feminist value of autonomy

*Prima facie*, individual autonomy holds intuitive appeal from a feminist perspective due to its promise as a tool to help women combat forces that undermine their decision-making authority<sup>65</sup>. Below, I will adduce several arguments in favour of autonomy as a positive feminist value. I contend that it has moral, political, emancipatory, empirical, and intrinsic value.

#### 2.2.1 Moral and political value

To articulate the moral and political value of autonomy, I turn toward an analogous discussion on liberalism. This literature often takes for granted an underlying idea about what autonomous agents are *like*, and prescribes rules about how we ought to treat autonomous agents on the basis of this picture. This picture, according to Thomas Hurka, presupposes

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Donchin, 'Autonomy, Interdependence, and Assisted Suicide: Respecting Boundaries/Crossing Lines', *Bioethics*, 14 (2000), 187-204 (p. 189).

“the human ideal of a person with knowledge and agency”<sup>66</sup>. This grounds the liberal argument that rejects undue state interference with citizens’ freedom of choice<sup>67</sup>. Catriona Mackenzie says that “in liberal democratic polities, the principle of respect for autonomy is widely accepted...as a cardinal moral value that should guide political deliberation, public policy and practice, as well as our attitudes toward our fellow citizens”<sup>68</sup>. For Mackenzie, what it means to exercise this respect is to let persons live according to their own conceptions of the good<sup>69</sup>. This normative principle finds its grounding in the idea that people can *set* their own conceptions of the good, which in this context culminates in a kind of right open to the individual to manifest the “normative power for the individual to choose and direct their lives in ways that reflect one’s own reasons”<sup>70</sup>.

It is valuable to be considered an autonomous agent because of the *status worth* that such a description imports for the individual. This status worth defines ways it is appropriate to treat *any* person who can self-determine in the ways described above – as persons with the ability to exercise their own decisions according to their own reason, preferences, interests. As Jennifer Nedelsky says, autonomous status is “a value that takes its meaning from the recognition of (and respect for) the inherent individuality of each person”<sup>71</sup>. It is a concept that can arbitrate the tension between the *independent* and *interdependent* agency of persons. Moreover, autonomy has political value inasmuch as the internalization of the concept of autonomy in a state serves as the mainstay for liberal societies. The concept of autonomy also serves as a central guideline for acceptable state policies in general. As John Christman and Joel Anderson put it, “...debates over political liberalism address a wide variety of issues, from citizenship and minority rights...at stake in virtually all of these discussions, however, is the nature of the autonomous agent, whose perspective and interests are fundamental for the derivation of liberal principles”<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hurka, ‘Why Value Autonomy?’ in *Drawing Morals: Essays in Ethical Theory*, ed. By Thomas Hurka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 139-160, p. 139.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Catriona Mackenzie, ‘Relational Autonomy, Normative Authority, and Perfectionism’, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 39 (2008), 512-533 (p. 512).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Nedelsky, ‘Reconceiving Autonomy: Sources, Thoughts, and Possibilities’, *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism*, 1 (1989), 7-36 (p. 35).

<sup>72</sup> John Christman and Joel Anderson, ‘Introduction’, *New Essays: Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-26, p. 1.

To recapitulate, any individual who is bequeathed autonomous status have much to gain in terms of how they are *valued* morally and politically. Though I have laid out the discussion as it plays out in liberal political theory, these implications appear genial to a feminist perspective as well. *Anyone* who is valued in the ways described above are bestowed a special kind of status that make them the subjects of treatments that centre around respect (both negatively, as in non-interference, and positively, as bearers of moral and political value), which it seems difficult to object to from a moral and political standpoint. And if we agree that women ought to be regarded as the equal and proper candidates for moral and political status, it should be clear why this value is also attractive from a feminist point of view. Take the Suffragettes as exhibiting an example of this imperative. The campaign for the enfranchisement of women can be mapped onto the idea that women have the relevant capacities in virtue of which it is appropriate for them to have a vote, which in turn signals a move toward the view that they ought to be seen as proper recipients of moral and political status.

### 2.2.2 Emancipatory value

Perhaps the liberal vision of autonomy's value is yet unconvincing from a feminist standpoint. Linda Barclay points out that Feminism, as a shared movement, has been majorly characterized through the "various ways it has resisted and challenged traditional communities"<sup>73</sup>. She mentions that a central feminist critique of contemporary liberalism is that its "emphasis on formal equality and individual rights as a means to protect individual autonomy....fails to deliver substantial equality and individual freedom...because of its failure to address those social forces, such as gender socialization, that radically delimit the actual choices available to some individuals"<sup>74</sup>. This concern seems to cast some doubt over the actual moral and political value of autonomy. Even if everyone, including women, were considered as equal *candidates* of this value, and granted corresponding formal equality and rights, how can we ensure this has a meaningful effect?

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<sup>73</sup> Linda Barclay, 'Autonomy and The Social Self', in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 52-71, p. 68.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Still, there is much promise for autonomy to be used in ways that will yield real value for feminists. Many feminist scholars agree that autonomy can be an important tool of emancipation and empowerment for those who deal with systemic abuse, domination, or other oppressive circumstances<sup>75</sup>. Jean Grimshaw, for instance, observes that: “Women have so often been in situations of powerlessness...that any system of belief or programme of action that could count as 'feminist' must in some way see [autonomy] as a central concern”<sup>76</sup>. Furthermore, Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper write that “If feminism is a response to the oppression of women, and if resistance and emancipation include living according to one’s own lights, then autonomy is central to issues in feminist philosophy... autonomy includes the ability to shape our own lives...rather than being directed by external forces that manipulate or distort us.”<sup>77</sup> These scholars seem to be using the concept of autonomy as a device of *advocacy* and as a critical *corrective*. So we might think of the emancipatory value of autonomy as encompassing two major aims. First, autonomy can be raised as a *claim* to not only be respected and granted moral and political status *de jure* in a society that distributes this status disparately along gender-based lines, but also a *demand* that this imperative be effective *de facto*. This is the advocacy aspect for which autonomy can be employed. Second, when I talk of it being a critical corrective, it can be employed as a *repudiatory* critique against structures and institutions that dominate, chain, or place individuals in positions of precarity and vulnerability. In both senses, autonomy is utilized as a kind of appeal on behalf of individuals who may not be accorded moral and political status *in practice*.

So autonomy can be set as a progressive standard and as an ongoing topic of concern in a non-ideal world wherein women or others are subject to domination and oppressive environments. Marina Oshana is one defender of autonomy as an emancipatory value. She defines feminism as the “advocating for the equal rights of women and ending the oppression and exploitation of women and girls”<sup>78</sup>, and says that a ‘thick’ account of autonomy is

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<sup>75</sup> Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper, ‘Introduction’, in *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*, ed. By Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 1-14, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Jean Grimshaw, ‘Autonomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking’, in *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* ed. By M. Griffiths and M. Whitford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988) pp. 90-108, p. 90.

<sup>77</sup> Veltman and Piper, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Marina Oshana, ‘A Commitment to Autonomy Is a Commitment to Feminism’, in *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*, ed. By Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 141-162, p. 153.

necessary to achieve such feminist goals. On her view, a ‘thin’ account of autonomy rests on “a person’s free acceptance of and willingness to defend her circumstances.”<sup>79</sup> But this is not enough, at least if we are concerned with practicable feminist goals. She claims that no person in a society, especially those who are vulnerable, can actually determine how they shall live unless they are “part of enduring social relations and shared traditions”<sup>80</sup> that grant them legal and practical authority over the core areas of their life in a non-prohibitive fashion. The agent with ‘thick’ autonomy is one who is self-governing in an *effective* sense; and an agent is only self-governing “...when she has a kind of authority over oneself as well as the power to act on that authority”<sup>81</sup> Oshana’s concern is that places like the United States, for example, provide ‘ample lip service’ to feminism in committing to the claim that men and women have equal value. Her insight is that societies must support feminist goals in a substantive way. The ‘moral commitment’ to gender equality only exists in the abstract without a notion of thick autonomy; it is a “cold comfort for one whose autonomy is elusive or denied altogether in fact”<sup>82</sup>.

Of course, this is not to say that a society cannot be inconsistent in upholding such imperatives. Oshana also says that we should be careful not to criticize the usefulness of autonomy in relation to feminism by creating a straw man of a ‘caricatured’ autonomy as a form of individualism “hostile to social goods and relationships”<sup>83</sup>. Setting aside the matter of whether we actually agree with Oshana’s thick view of autonomy, however, we see how the concept and value of autonomy can, and *is*, productively delineated by feminists toward emancipatory goals.

### 2.2.3 Instrumental value

Hopefully, the moral, political, and emancipatory dimensions of autonomy’s value solidify why it is generally in feminist interests to adopt the concept. Yet there is another reason to value autonomy, and not just in the senses as described above. We might make a Millian claim about the value of autonomy as something which in fact leads to a material *benefit* for agents. John Stuart Mill argued that “the only freedom which deserves the name”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>84</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), p. 28.

is the liberty by which every individual can pursue their own conception of the good<sup>85</sup>. Individuals, on his view, are the best judges of their own interests; this makes the exercise of personal autonomy the best chance one has at a good life. Thus, the right of autonomy *and* the exercise of the capacity of autonomy (that is, autonomy with a Millian focus on self-chosen conceptions of the good) “may both have substantial instrumental hedonic benefits”<sup>86</sup>.

The claim that there is a positive correlation between autonomy and well-being has empirical support in psychological literature. I will borrow from the literature on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to make this case. SDT is a macro-theory of human motivation that addresses “basic issues as personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, nonconscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behavior, and wellbeing”<sup>87</sup>. SDT researchers differentiate between types of motivation, one of them notably being autonomous motivation. Edward Deci and Richard Ryan say that “When people are autonomously motivated, they experience volition, or a self-endorsement of their actions.”<sup>88</sup> As the standard definition operating in the literature, autonomy in this sense closely resembles Frankfurtian hierarchicalism, or alternatively the ‘thin’ sense of autonomy as described by Oshana (though the SDT definition is sufficiently wide to cover other accounts of autonomy). Having autonomy in the SDT sense does not *necessarily* require that the individual be free of external socialization, as long as their choices are wholeheartedly endorsed. It is also not presupposed that an autonomous act is purely independent in the sense of having broken free from antecedent psychological and physiological conditions. Moreover, autonomy does not require alternative choice, so long as the autonomous act “honestly reflects the values of the individual”<sup>89</sup>. The inclusion of social factors in the SDT view of autonomy make it a conception that resembles and overlaps with

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<sup>85</sup> Mill did not employ the term ‘autonomy’ specifically. However, we can treat his account of liberty as one that denotes the moral and political value of individual autonomy.

<sup>86</sup> Stephen Darwall, ‘The Value of Autonomy and Autonomy of the Will’, *Ethics*, 116 (2006), 263-284 (p. 265).

<sup>87</sup> E. L. Deci, & R. M. Ryan, ‘Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health.’ *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 49 (2008), 182-185 (p. 182).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Sonia Secher Wichmann, ‘Self-Determination Theory: The Importance of Autonomy to Well-Being Across Cultures’, *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 50 (2011), 16-26 (p. 17).

the concept of personal autonomy in philosophical literature – including feminist accounts of autonomy.

In a review of SDT research done on the relationship between autonomy and well-being (where well-being is defined as “a person’s level of happiness as the person perceives it”<sup>90</sup>), several studies suggest a positive correlation. A study conducted by Sheldon and Bettencourt in the US measured five need-satisfaction constructs (including autonomy), investigating how the constructs are related to each other and how each construct relates to positive/negative affect, motivation, and commitment. What an analysis of the data revealed was a positive relationship between autonomy and well-being<sup>91</sup>. Now it may be argued that the relationship between autonomy and well-being is dependent on cultural context. One may postulate that in countries like the US, where individualism is culturally celebrated, the relationship is stronger than in more ‘collectivist’ countries like China. However, studies conducted in more collectivist culture reflected similar findings<sup>92</sup>.

Studies on SDT are too vast to critically survey in-depth here; but the general consensus in the psychological literature, at least, seems to be that autonomy has a high correlation with well-being. So it is plausible, in line with this research, that there is something about autonomy which in fact conduces to well-being across a multitude of cultures and contexts. Though some would claim that autonomy is primarily relevant for cultures that champion individualism over cultures that value collectivism<sup>93</sup>, there is a case to be made that autonomy is of virtually universal importance for individual psychological well-being.

The SDT literature is one that is of interest to philosophers working on the topic of autonomy as a resource that can corroborate the positive relationship between autonomy and well-being. The instrumental value of autonomy can also appeal to feminist scholars. The beneficial effects of autonomy strengthen the reasons we already have to advocate and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.34

<sup>92</sup> See Vansteenkiste, M., Zhou, M., Lens, W., & Soenens, B., ‘Experiences of autonomy and control among Chinese learners: Vitalizing or immobilizing?’, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97 (2005), 468-483

<sup>93</sup> E. L. Deci, & R. M. Ryan, ‘Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health.’ *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 49 (2008), 182-185, p. 183.



support it. Feminists can argue, for instance, that a conventional male-dominated society diminishes or suppresses women's autonomy, or that it is in practice diminished or suppressed because of the incongruity of autonomy women face in society relative to men. The SDT literature gives us a credible positive association between autonomy and well-being. To the extent that this positive correlation holds, it seems quite likely that conventional societies are not only diminishing women's autonomy, but also their well-being. This gives feminists reason to oppose norms and practices that diminish or suppress women's autonomy. It is not only autonomy that is at stake, but other effects it conduces to, such as well-being.

#### **2.2.4 Intrinsic value**

As mentioned, we have reason to want to promote autonomy for its beneficial consequences. However, conceptualizing autonomy merely as an *instrumental* type of value (as a prerequisite to well-being) would be a mistake. It is possible to do things autonomously that *fail* to promote welfare (it may even *demote* welfare). Stephen Darwall says that "...as important as autonomy is to human happiness and welfare, it nevertheless seems clear that what someone wants, or even what she would want were she to exercise her capacity for autonomy (personal, rational, or moral), can diverge from her happiness or well-being."<sup>94</sup> Autonomy and well-being are values that can come apart. But if this is the case, we need to get clearer on the intrinsic value autonomy has. We need to think about why we ought to value autonomy over and above the direct promotion of well-being or happiness, for instance. Just how valuable would autonomy really be if it *weren't* likely to advance well-being, one's moral and political standing, and so on?

The question at stake is whether we have non-instrumental reasons to retain and promote autonomy. I believe it is possible to argue for autonomy's value besides its instrumental value. One attempt to defend a strong version of this view is offered by Marina Oshana. Oshana says it is possible that autonomy is more important than even well-being<sup>95</sup>, and gives us a thought experiment to make her case. She asks us to imagine a society in which benevolent philosopher kings or queens preside over society. The citizens of this society are well fed, sheltered, and educated by those who really have their best interests at heart. Oshana says, aside from the 'obvious complications' that arise when we ask "whether

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<sup>94</sup> Darwall, p. 266.

<sup>95</sup> Marina Oshana, 'The Autonomy Boogeyman', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 35 (2001), 209-226 (p. 225).

the interests of the many can be settled by a select and privileged few”<sup>96</sup>, a society like this is one without opportunity, and no need to “anguish over matters as momentous as the choice of a job, a spouse, a political candidate, an educational institution for our children, or the decision to undergo a medical procedure.”<sup>97</sup> She continues that though citizens in this society have no decision-making authority over matters related to their “familial, political, economic, educational, and social circumstances”<sup>98</sup>, they also do not “confront the practical and emotional challenges that accompany economic, educational, religious, marital, familial, and political responsibility and independence”<sup>99</sup>.

The scenario above presents a case where society purportedly upholds conditions that are to the benefit of its people, but which seems intuitively repulsive nonetheless because of the way personal choice is stripped from them. It seems, *prima facie*, that the repugnance the example elicits is due to the marked lack of autonomy that characterizes this society. I take her point to be that we would be remiss not to regard self-governance as having a value of a kind that is non-derivative. While we should be concerned with well-being, happiness, and other things that add value to our lives, it seems that the value of autonomy cannot be substituted by any other kind of value. As we see in her example of a benevolent but effectively authoritarian state, the fact that people are treated well does not help make such a state a desirable one. She says that “we think that it is a good thing for people to have authority over the social and emotional relations in their lives. Whether our choices be for good or for evil, we care that the choices are ours...”<sup>100</sup>

Still, we might raise several points against the primacy of autonomy as an intrinsic value. One may argue that the objectionable quality of Oshana’s example above has nothing to do with autonomy being an intrinsic value that trumps considerations of well-being. Rather, it is consistent with the idea that autonomy constitutes welfare that the scenario appears to us as problematic – it may be one’s life tends to not go *as* well as it would have if one is globally subject to the dictates of others. Perhaps personal achievement *feels* more satisfying for the agent than the inherited benevolence characteristic of Oshana’s imagined society. Perhaps being thwarted from personal autonomy inevitably thwarts our ability to

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

practice and nurture individuated skills conducive to our happiness (creativity, leadership, self-selected relationships). Furthermore, our intuitions may be misled by the severity of the case. It is perhaps difficult as one familiar with liberalism *not* to find it degrading or otherwise contrary to our sense of what is morally and politically right to be subject to unilateral paternalism. Take *pragmatic subjectivism*, for instance. This is the view that policy decisions aimed at promoting well-being are “justified only when they are grounded in the conceptions of well-being of those on whose behalf policy is made”<sup>101</sup>. This principle applies regardless of whether well-being is subjective or objective in its value. One rationale for adopting a pragmatic subjectivist view of well-being policy is that “it represents a workable approach given the diversity of values in modern democratic societies”<sup>102</sup>. Oshana’s imagined society can be interpreted as an example that goes against this type of view, since the citizen’s own viewpoints are excluded. Thus we can criticize her benevolent/authoritarian state along these lines without having to claim that the value of autonomy is intrinsic.

Moreover, even if we do recognize the intrinsic value of autonomy, we can argue that it does not have primacy. It may not be a value *preferable* to welfare. For instance, delegating important decisions to a trusted family member does not seem to evoke the sense of repugnance the way that Oshana’s example does. Even as we relinquish our own self-governance, there are some cases in which we would find it acceptable not to prioritize the value of autonomy. So why give it special precedence? We might suspect, also, that claims about autonomy as topping the hierarchy of values encourages an unsavoury view of the self that cares only about autonomy at the expense of other important values and considerations. Jukka Varelius, for instance, is sceptical about the priority that autonomy has over other values in realms like medical ethics. It is often accepted in medical practice that a patient’s *autonomous* wishes ought to be fully respected, even if the patient’s wish is to die<sup>103</sup>. The issue of patient autonomy in the context of medicine is not one I will address in detail here, but the point is that the value of autonomy has gained priority over the years, with rather controversial implications. Important as autonomy is, purporting that it supersedes other values could be an unwarranted overestimation of its primacy.

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<sup>101</sup> Daniel M. Haybron and Valerie Tiberius, ‘Well-Being Policy: What Standard of Well-Being?’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2015) 712–733 (p. 713).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 714.

<sup>103</sup> Jukka Varelius, ‘The Value of Autonomy in Medical Ethics’, *Medicine, Health Care, and Philosophy*, 9 (2006), 377–388 (p. 378).

Thus, it is a controversial claim to say that autonomy is an intrinsic value with primacy *over* other values. It is true that the priority of autonomy's value in the non-derivative, non-instrumental sense, is mainly gleaned by intuition: we simply assume that it is a *better* state of affairs to be autonomous than it is to be otherwise. As seen above, this assumption is not without its objections. However, I believe there is a version of this statement that will be more palatable. We can accept that autonomy has both intrinsic and instrumental value and that it competes meaningfully with other values. This may well give rise to genuine dilemmas about what to prioritize, which will no doubt generate further questions about principles we might use to weigh up and mediate between values. Problematic aspects notwithstanding, it seems important to emphasize that autonomy is not reducible to an instrumental sort of value but that its significance is foundational: this is the view that must underlie our feminist considerations about autonomy.

### 2.3 The standard feminist critique

I hope the arguments sketched out above successfully evince the value of autonomy in general, but also demonstrate why such values are of interest for a feminist perspective. Now I will address the flip side. Some feminists are sceptical about the “male oriented principle of autonomy”<sup>104</sup>. Call this *the traditional view* of autonomy. This view is associated with liberal individualism<sup>105</sup> and is thought of as an ideal “inimical to many women”<sup>106</sup>. Although I argued in the previous section that the importance of autonomy for feminism is analogous to that of autonomy for liberalism, we need to redress this traditional view of autonomy.

What I dub the *standard feminist critique of autonomy* hereto challenges the traditional view of autonomy, which operates on individualistic and rationalistic<sup>107</sup> assumptions about persons. In one sense, the dominant conception of the autonomous agent may worry the feminist critic because it is in practice feasible to attain for men, yet burdensome to attain for women. Marilyn Friedman, for instance, says that in the context of

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<sup>104</sup> S.C. Lee, ‘On Relational Autonomy’, in *The Family, Medical Decision-Making, and Biotechnology, Philosophy and Medicine*, 91 (2007), 83-93 (p. 84)

<sup>105</sup> Marilyn Friedman, ‘Feminism in ethics: Conceptions of autonomy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. by Miranda Fricker & Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp. 205-224, p. 207.

<sup>106</sup> Lorraine Code, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* (New York: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>107</sup> Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, ‘Autonomy Refigured’, in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3-34, p. 3.

heterosocial interaction, women's autonomy is more vulnerable to threat because on top of "social relationships and cultural resources"<sup>108</sup> that *anyone* needs to realize autonomy, women require "extra social protection against male strength and aggression"<sup>109</sup>. Though I hesitate to espouse terminology that reinforces the concept of female weakness vs. male strength, I am sympathetic to her point that individuals in positions of social dominance often act autonomously "at the expense of the autonomy of subordinated persons"<sup>110</sup>. Individuals who are subordinated in society are denied "some measure of social recognition and respect for their moral competence"<sup>111</sup>. In a non-ideal world where such instances are realities, it seems like endorsing the traditional view of autonomy without qualification is little more than a celebration of *male* autonomy. Friedman thinks that male autonomy, to the extent that it represents this heterosocial, anti-communal identity, is not valuable (though she takes this as reason to augment women's autonomy "while at the same time restraining male aggression"<sup>112</sup>).

We might also believe that, aside from the concern that the traditional view is inaccessible to women, it also *shuns* characteristics and values of traditionally feminine lives. This not only eludes women who have to navigate a male-dominated society (as alleged above), but has the effect of undervaluing other values like trust, loyalty, and friendship<sup>113</sup>. On the traditional view, aspects of life like care, dependence/interdependence, and vulnerability may be seen as necessary weaknesses and hindrances to agency rather than possible strengths. By extension, emotions or feelings related to attachment in these senses may also be seen as obstacles to autonomy. For example, narratives about women's choices tend to treat care-oriented decisions as personal 'sacrifices' – that is, inimical to autonomy. A new mother who has the option to be a stay at home mom may be framed in terms of what she has 'given up', namely, her career, rather than what she has *gained* because of her choice; yet the mother who goes back to work full time is dubbed a 'supermom'<sup>114</sup>. As such there

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<sup>108</sup> Marilyn Friedman, 'Autonomy and Male Dominance', in *New Essays: Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism*, ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 150-176, p. 162.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>113</sup> Mackenzie and Stoljar, p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> Merriam-Webster defines 'supermom' as 'a woman who performs the traditional duties of housekeeping and child-rearing while also having a full-time job'

may not be much value in seeing the traditional view of autonomy as applicable to women when this depreciates traits she has that are traditionally ascribed or culturally encoded as feminine.

Lastly, there is a more general worry that the traditional conception decontextualizes the individual by imagining them *outside* of the environment in which they are in fact embedded. This has the effect of underappreciating the fact that the individual is socially situated. Such a view raises the concern that it presents a mistaken view about what human beings are actually like<sup>115</sup>, and that it ignores or underestimates the possible effects that *problematic* relatedness, such as oppression, might have for autonomy.

### 2.3.1 An unattainable ideal

But *how* exactly does the traditional view manifest? One such area in which the traditional view finds implicit endorsement is as a masculinized cultural character ideal. Marilyn Friedman, for instance, raises the example of the artist Paul Gauguin's decision to "abandon his family and middle-class life as a stockbroker in Paris to travel to Mediterranean France, Tahiti, and Martinique in search of artistic subjects and inspiration"<sup>116</sup>. Gauguin was in turmoil over the dilemma he faced: choosing between his art and his family. He wrote, however, that "One man's faculties cannot cope with two things at once, and I for one can do one thing only: paint. Everything else leaves me stupefied"<sup>117</sup>. His artwork came to be prized and widely celebrated, and though Gauguin's success on this front has nothing to do with his familial desertion, Friedman's point is that leaving behind a family didn't *tarnish* his reputation - it seems, rather, to have added a dreamy dimension to his biography.

Friedman says these kinds of narratives suggest autonomy in practice is "antithetical to women's interests because it prompts men to desert the social relationships on which many

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<sup>115</sup> Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, however, have argued that the 'metaphysical critique' of autonomy, which claims that 'attributing autonomy to agents is tantamount to supposing that agents are atomistic', rests on a mistaken assumption about what theories of autonomy presuppose. See: Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 'Autonomy Refigured', in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

<sup>116</sup> Marilyn Friedman, 'Autonomy, Social Disruption, and Women', in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 35-51, p. 35.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

women depend on for their survival...”<sup>118</sup>. Autonomy celebrated in this sense romanticizes Man’s quest for meaning, as he embarks on a journey of transcendence and alienation of social ties, as if this necessarily brings him closer to his truer self. This may be why feminist philosophers find the concept of autonomy to be preoccupied with “self-realization at the expense of human connection”<sup>119</sup>. As Friedman further points out, “men still seem to predominate in fact and fiction as the protagonists of stories about heroes...whether as war heroes, civil rights activists, entrepreneurs, or adventurers.”<sup>120</sup>

The lionization of men who meet the criteria for the autonomous man thus serves as an example of a way that the traditional view of autonomy has problematically manifested as a cultural ideal. From a feminist perspective, we may object both because of the fact that women don’t have the same *opportunities* as men to achieve this ideal, and that they are not *lauded* in the same way as men when they do in fact attain this ideal. Autonomy in the sense explained is not only *inopportune* but also viewed as *inappropriate* for women. Let us briefly take a look at this passage from Henrik Ibsen’s play, ‘A Doll’s House’, in which Nora, who feels that she exists merely as a ‘doll-wife’<sup>121</sup>, explains in an exchange with her husband Torvald Helmer why she is leaving him:

**“Helmer.** To desert your home, your husband and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

**Nora.** I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

**Helmer.** It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

**Nora.** What do you consider my most sacred duties?

**Helmer.** Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

**Nora.** I have other duties just as sacred.

**Helmer.** That you have not. What duties could those be?

**Nora.** Duties to myself.

**Helmer.** Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 100.

<sup>121</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2542/2542-h/2542-h.htm>>

**Nora.** I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are--or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.”<sup>122</sup>

In the passage above, Nora is doing something similar to Paul Gauguin: she decides to leave behind a family to “become” herself – to figure out who she is, *separate* from the doll that has been made of her in her married life. Yet in her case it is seen as inappropriate. But even if Nora was respected for her decision and did not encounter any obstacle in her endeavour to find herself, we might doubt whether her decision should not invite some censure. Whilst we would want to celebrate women coming into their own, we have to wonder why women should become more *like* men (in the sense of possessing more conventionally masculine characteristics like care-severing independence) to be autonomous in the first place. As much as Nora asserts herself as an individual by making the difficult choice to leave, her choice also entails a loss of rather major aspects of herself: that of serving her role as a mother and partner. But there does not seem much to extol about women’s autonomy if what we mean is simply the expectation for women to be equally admired for characteristics and choices that reflect the traditional conception of the autonomous man. Thus autonomy as a character ideal may *in practice* underappreciate traditionally feminine lives and values.

### **2.3.2 The traditional view in philosophy**

We clearly have cause to be concerned about autonomy as a cultural character ideal because of the way it tends to idealize hyper-individualized masculinity. Yet if it’s a problem of popular culture the problem doesn’t look to be one of autonomy as a theory but rather traits that are valued in society ascribed as ideally autonomous. However, similar concerns are reflected in feminist insights about the type of ‘autonomy’ that predominate academic moral and political philosophy. Lorraine Code, for instance, claims that mainstream philosophy has an ‘obsession’ with a type of autonomy that overemphasizes independence and self-sufficiency at the expense of more interdependent values<sup>123</sup>. Pamela Sue Anderson

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 85.



points out that autonomy holds “a privileged place in modern moral philosophy” and is a ‘linchpin for modern liberalism’<sup>124</sup>. Furthermore, Anderson mentions “From Kant to Mill...to those contemporary philosophers who still play a part in the tradition of political liberalism, we can find agreement on the centrality of autonomy in the assessment of political institutions”<sup>125</sup>. And though *definitions* of autonomy are variegated and oft subject to dispute in the literature, we are not short of examples in the history of liberal moral and political philosophy of agents who are idealized in precisely the ways that some feminists reject.

Let us briefly consider a few examples of influential philosophers’ work whose views on selfhood reflect the ‘autonomous man’. I would be remiss not to mention Kantian moral autonomy as an example. Setting aside the fact that ‘autonomy’ for Kant denotes a very distinct type of moral self-legislation (and one that would be a mistake to conflate with the senses of autonomy that concerns our discussion), scholars recognize that the view of autonomy to which feminists take issue has its roots in Kant, whose notion of autonomy is an exercise in the freedom of the will of a rational and self-conscious agent<sup>126</sup>. Kant has frequently been regarded as the principal philosopher attributed with the deliverance of a “picture of reason that has been employed in a variety of ways oppressive to women”<sup>127</sup> to modern Western Philosophy. To the extent that the Kantian view informs or is treated as authoritative in wide-ranging strands of philosophical literature, it could be argued that it is a view that pervades related discussion in a problematic way.

Susan Moller Okin points out that someone like John Rawls’, for instance, whose theory of justice is mostly “in the language of rational choice”<sup>128</sup>, reflects “both Kant’s stress on autonomy and rationality as the defining characteristics of moral subjects and his rigid separation of reason from feeling and refusal to allow feeling any place in the formulation of moral principles”<sup>129</sup>. Okin suggests that this ‘Kantian connection’ made it difficult for Rawls to acknowledge “any role for empathy or benevolence in the formulation of his principles of

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<sup>124</sup> Pamela Sue Anderson, ‘Autonomy, Vulnerability, and Gender’, *Feminist Theory*, 4 (2003), 149-164 (p. 149).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Lauren Freeman, ‘Reconsidering Relational Autonomy: A Feminist Approach to Selfhood and the Other in the Thinking of Martin Heidegger’, *Inquiry*, 54 (2011), 361-383 (p. 364).

<sup>127</sup> Kurt Mosser, ‘Kant and Feminism’, *Kant-Studien*, 90 (1999), 322-353 (p. 322).

<sup>128</sup> Susan Moller Okin, ‘Reason and Feeling in Thinking About Justice’, *Ethics*, 99(1989), 229-249 (p. 231).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

justice”<sup>130</sup>. Communitarians, for instance, critique Rawls’ tendency to downplay “the significance of communal values in shaping moral-political lives”<sup>131</sup>. Now take Rawls’ concept of the Original Position. On this notion it is alleged that principles of justice are adjudicated fairly and impartially by the rationality we can exercise only when stripped *away* of knowledge about our social embeddedness in the world<sup>132</sup>. This (at least superficially) suggests that the ‘ideal’ agent in this framework of justice is one who is impartial and rational. Rawls’ idea of the ‘veil of ignorance’ is meant to help the rational thinker rid themselves of the arbitrary prejudices and biases that would get in the way of coming up with the most *just* principles. Yet this may implicitly treat our involvedness with others, and our social knowledge about others, as *inevitable* hindrances on our ability to be rational about what is just.

As Mari J. Matsuda points out, Rawls “assumes self-interest and mutual disinterest”<sup>133</sup>. One who is in the original position has no idea of what privileges they will have in life, but they do know “that they will want to maximize their advantages”<sup>134</sup>. This Rawlsian picture of the social world makes it sensible to “place primary value on liberty”<sup>135</sup>. She suggests, however, that contrary to this picture, feminist theory enables us to imagine how:

“...we can achieve identity of interest on the real-life side of the veil. In that world, people would not be moved solely by self-interest, but also by feelings of love, intimacy, and care for others. They would be in a perpetual state of mutual concern...There is an element of self-interest in this proposition, but it is not a dismal struggle for individual advantage within the merely-convenient context of social union that Rawls proposes.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Lorraine Code, ‘Perversions of Autonomy and The Subjection of Women’, in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 181-212, p. 183.

<sup>132</sup> Samuel Freeman, “Original Position”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/original-position/>>

<sup>133</sup> Mari J. Matsuda, ‘Liberal Jurisprudence and Abstracted Visions of Human Nature: A Feminist Critique of Rawls’ Theory of Justice’, *New Mexico Law Review*, 16 (1986), 613-630 (p. 624).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 625.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 627.

I make no comment here as to whether Rawls' view ultimately gets it right. I am simply pointing out ways that feminist critics have problematized the underlying conceptions of agents in his theory. Though a thorough review is not possible here, I showed here a few examples of ways that feminist critics might raise concerns of some of the ideas by influential philosophers like Kant and Rawls that idealize rationality (construed as oppositional to the more affective features of human life) in their moral or political pursuits. In mentioning these familiar philosophical ideas, I do not deny their importance in the philosophical canon. I also do not believe that the views of agency and personhood borne of these influential frameworks of ethical and political theory are *inherently* 'masculinized' and cannot be defended or rearticulated from a feminist point of view<sup>137</sup>. My point is rather that the most recognizable examples we have to go on about agency and personhood in the Western philosophical tradition *tend* to emphasize rationality, impartiality, and objectivity as the default ideal, perhaps at the expense of, or simply without due acknowledgement of, traditionally feminine aspects of agency that feminist critics of autonomy claim are undervalued. Friedman maintains that "mainstream philosophical accounts of autonomy have little to say about what is wrong with those popular masculine ideals. They simply ignore the ideals that shape the popular understanding of autonomy."<sup>138</sup>

#### **2.4 Moving towards relational autonomy**

Note that the standard feminist critique of autonomy points out not that autonomy is an *inherently* anti-feminist concept, but rather that popular imaginings and philosophical traditions of it pose issues. The pressing concern seems to be that instances of the traditional view are abundant and prevalent, be that in an academic or every-day context; and there is a *dearth* of counter-examples that have sufficient traction to compete alongside the predominant view. What the feminist critique highlights, then, is not a need to reject autonomy, but rather a need to rehabilitate the concept.

Feminist philosophers working to rehabilitate the concept of autonomy generally advance the idea of 'relational autonomy'. I take 'relational autonomy' to be an umbrella term<sup>139</sup> used to refer to accounts of autonomy that share commonalities. Supporters of

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<sup>137</sup> For an example of a philosopher who has defended Kantian philosophy as a possible resource to feminists, see Carol Hay's *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism: Resisting Oppression* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)

<sup>138</sup> Friedman, 'Feminism in ethics: Conceptions of autonomy', p. 218.

<sup>139</sup> Mackenzie and Stoljar, p. 4.

relational approaches, like feminist critics of autonomy, tend to take a critical stance on some conceptions of autonomy, but view it as a concept that can be salvaged in productive ways.

One broad feature relational approaches have in common is some version of the idea that individuals are *social* individuals, and that this view of individuals as social is compatible with autonomy. They recognize autonomy as a value “while eschewing the individualism associated with some liberal and especially libertarian conceptions of autonomy.”<sup>140</sup> They acknowledge that individual identities are scaffolded and shaped by their relationships and social determinants like gender, class, and race<sup>141</sup>. Linda Barclay captures this idea by claiming that “autonomy is...something we develop only in society”<sup>142</sup>, that a precondition for our being able to ‘sustain’ autonomy is “...attributable to our developing and remaining embedded within a network of social relationships”<sup>143</sup>. Relational approaches are thus concerned with establishing that autonomy is compatible with relationality. The level at which relationality is worked into the concept of autonomy will be explored in the next section.

We might question, however, whether such an assertion is truly distinctive of relational approaches. After all, most theories of autonomy on offer, feminist or non-feminist, do not seriously *deny* that agents are socialized, and social, beings, even if they differ with respect to the emphasis given to the relevance of this fact. But the difference of emphasis is instructive: relational approaches highlight and bring attention to the social aspects of autonomy-making, going a step further than subsuming these ideas only in implicit fashion.

On a related note, I would add that relational approaches are united in their valuing of feminine autonomy. What I mean by valuing feminine autonomy is both the idea that autonomy can be borne of traditionally feminine values, and that women’s choices in general should be valued equally. Since feminist theorists of autonomy take interest in critiquing the

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<sup>140</sup> Catriona Mackenzie, ‘The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability’ in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 33-59, p. 42.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>142</sup> Barclay, p. 57.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

traditional view, actively reforming the *image* of who the autonomous person could be makes up part of that task.

Finally, relational approaches tend to aim to dismantle possible social threats to autonomy by analysing “...the specific ways in which oppressive socialization and oppressive social relationships can impede autonomous agency...”<sup>144</sup> Relational accounts are not only concerned with social factors in general, but seek to explore and explain how *onerous* forms of socialization affect autonomy.

#### **2.4.1 Minimally and maximally relational autonomy**

Now that we have an idea of relational autonomy’s general aims, I will explore how we might distinguish between varieties of relational approaches, and the tensions and divergences that surface between them.

I will characterize relational approaches as occupying some place on a *scale* of minimally and maximally relational. I would say *minimally* relational theories are approaches which accept that socialization and social environmental factors contribute, affect, perhaps even *partially* constitute, individual autonomy in some sense. However, it still permits or enables some process of *distinguishing* or analysing the autonomous individual away from these factors. Maximally relational theories, at the other end of the scale, accept this connection in a much thicker sense: social or relational factors constitute autonomy in a *whole* sense. It poses an inextricable symbiosis of autonomy and relationality, compared to the more minimal approach that suggests autonomy and relationality can come apart. I will employ examples of both varieties below to illustrate the differences.

Take Marilyn Friedman’s account. She says that what matters for autonomy is that “someone has a certain distinctive stance, the stance of cares, concerns, and commitments that comprise a self-reflective, practical perspective”<sup>145</sup>. On her view, the agent’s ‘perspectival identity’ is what we ought to assess for individual autonomy. Perspectival identity is the agent’s own sense of their perspective, whereas non-perspectival identity refers to traits or characteristics applied to an individual that they may or may not care about. Non-

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<sup>144</sup> Mackenzie and Stoljar, p. 22.

<sup>145</sup> Marilyn Friedman, ‘A Conception of Autonomy’, in *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* ed. By Marilyn Friedman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-29, p. 12.

perspectival traits can only be relevant to individual autonomy if they *matter* to the individual. Friedman says that “If being white, female, heterosexual, or Jewish are not traits I care about in myself, then I am not being autonomous when I happen to live in ways that accord with those traits”<sup>146</sup>. If a person does not particularly value or feel committed to the group to which they belong, “that attachment could not be the basis of the person’s autonomous choices”<sup>147</sup>.

Friedman’s framework is minimally relational in that she accepts that an autonomous person’s “resources for acting and reflecting are socially grounded”<sup>148</sup>. But on her vision, individuality is not only possible – it is a major aspect of autonomy. She points out that every human being, more or less, “is a named particular – named by other human beings, but a named particular all the same – with a name that distinguishes each one from nearly all of others”<sup>149</sup>. We are thereby “mutually individuated by embodiment and by ascribed nominal and narrative identities”<sup>150</sup> which grounds the possibility for persons to have individual agency. Relational factors, therefore, can be autonomy-defining, but are not necessarily so, since she sees asserting our distinctness as a way to further individuate ourselves, and claims that ‘highly’ autonomous beings are those who are “highly differentiated and individuated”<sup>151</sup>.

Now contrast this with Marina Oshana’s social-relational account autonomy. On her view, autonomy is the *actual* authority and control agents have (which she views as an ‘external’ rather than psychological phenomenon). She thinks there is something counter-intuitive about ‘psychological’ accounts that make it possible to ascribe autonomy to those who subscribe “...to slavery, to drug addiction, to imprisonment, or to spousal subservience, if these were desired and freely chosen states”<sup>152</sup>. On Oshana’s view, Friedman’s account would not be very illuminating: for one could assert perspectival identity, expressing and nourishing their self-reflective commitments and perspectives, without actually having a *de facto* control over the direction of their lives. So while on Friedman’s account it is the

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Oshana, ‘The Autonomy Bogeyman’, p. 215.

individual's own perspectival choice that is autonomy-making, on Oshana's it is *de facto* control.

It is even possible, on Oshana's account, for autonomy to be sensitive to non-perspectival ascription. If it is possible to assess the material advantages and disadvantages of various ascriptions of non-perspectival identities, one's non-perspectival identity may track autonomy more reliably, *contra* Friedman's view on which the perspectival aspect is the constant of autonomy. For example, a heterosexual male who does not identify with his non-perspectival ascription may nonetheless be perfectly autonomous on Oshana's account to the extent that the world *as it stands* privileges the hetero-male non-perspectival identity ascription and accords them social advantages not accorded to others. That is not to say, of course, that it doesn't matter at all whether a person identifies with or endorses their ascribed identity, but only that it is not highly relevant for autonomy. In this sense, Oshana's account is an instance of a maximally relational approach. While she would accept, like Friedman, social or relational factors as 'causes' of the agent's decision-making, her view goes much deeper: autonomy is more or less equivalent to the social or relational conditions that enable the agent to have *de facto* control.

So it looks like there is a tension between minimally and maximally relational approaches to autonomy. The point of divergence seems to focus on the question of how we are to conceptualize individuality and relationality as interconnected. Feminist critics of autonomy generally agree that *hyper*-individuality should be replaced with a more social conception of the self. But proponents of a more minimal approach may be worried that, taken to an extreme, a maximal approach might threaten a kind of erasure of individuality and independence altogether. I believe Friedman would find Oshana's view unacceptably strict for failing to appreciate "the widely varied types of selves we might each become"<sup>153</sup>. On the other side, proponents who want to support a more maximal approach may be sceptical that the minimal approach is enough to analyse the deeply embedded effects of social factors on autonomy. For instance, Oshana would probably doubt that a minimal approach like Friedman's account would be very productive for the task of problematizing inequalitarian social relationships.

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<sup>153</sup> Marilyn Friedman, 'Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique', in *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* ed. By Marilyn Friedman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 81-97, p. 93.

## 2.5 Four feminist commitments

I believe it is possible to formulate a blueprint or guideline of feminist conditions that any account of autonomy must meet to satisfy the concerns that motivate minimally and maximally relational approaches. Meeting this guideline can set a conciliatory standard that balances individuality with relationality. The four requirements I shall put forward are distinct, but often very closely related. The first is the *content analysis* condition. The other three conditions can be broadly categorized as *anti-perfectionist* conditions, and these are: *sociability*, *moral neutrality*, and *inclusivity*.

### 2.5.1 The content-analysis condition

The first requirement I propose is this: a feminist theory of autonomy must be able to analyse how oppressive norms and influences differ from other types of decision-making inputs. This is important, and of *feminist* interest, because the issue of oppression is not quite captured under other categories of threats to autonomy (e.g. coercion). As I mentioned previously, relational theories of *all* leanings tend to share the motivation to problematize pernicious forms of socialization, so the content-analysis condition seems like a sensible starting point.

This condition can be met easily by Oshana's maximally relational account, since any choice based on a condition or policy that perpetuates the deprivation of *de facto* control would count as illegitimate, even if it is freely and voluntarily endorsed. Accounts that are less radically relational, but posit *substantive* conditions on individual choice, will also be able to meet the content-analysis condition. Substantive accounts claim that certain values be adopted as part of the autonomous agent's "value of belief corpus"<sup>154</sup>. On Natalie Stoljar's account, for instance, choices *based on* false and oppressive gendered norms are automatically excluded from autonomy irrespective of whether the agent has reflected on them. Stoljar's account, unlike Oshana's, does not assess the problematic effects of oppression on autonomy based on an external analysis of the social relational conditions that actually hold. Rather, the tack Stoljar employs is to look at the infiltrating effect that

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<sup>154</sup> John Christman, 'Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and The Social Constitution of Selves, *Philosophical Studies*, 117 (2004), 143-164 (p. 148).



oppression has on the individual's competence. On her view, autonomy is tainted from within *because of* the agent adopting false and oppressive beliefs.

On the other hand, it may be more challenging for a minimally relational account of autonomy that is more *content-neutral* (like Friedman's view) to meet the content-analysis condition. Content-neutral theories tend to be unrestrictive regarding the contents of one's decision-making, so long as the agent has reflected on their choices "...in the right way, for example, with adequate information and an absence of undue pressure or coercion by others"<sup>155</sup>. Content-neutral theories neither condemn nor condone substantively *independent* behaviour, as much as it does not condemn nor condone *dependent* behaviour<sup>156</sup>. When it comes to decisions affected by the internalization of oppressive norms, there is no higher or lower value placed on such inputs. So we may worry that this allows for *too much* latitude in what are considered legitimate decision-making inputs. Either way, a credible answer must be provided as to how different types of *content* might distort an agent's autonomy.

### **2.5.2 Anti-perfectionist conditions**

Aside from the content-analysis condition, which is about a way of theorizing about autonomy such that it accounts for and distinguishes between oppressive vs. non-oppressive norms (or more generally, pernicious vs. non-pernicious norms), a feminist account of autonomy must also call for several anti-perfectionist conditions in line with concerns that bind various accounts of relational autonomy. What I mean by anti-perfectionist conditions are conditions that would act as a failsafe for a feminist account not to be subject to the problematic implications of the traditional view of autonomy. Thus, anti-perfectionist conditions must adopt sociability, moral neutrality, and inclusivity. I explain below why these conditions are important to adopt.

#### **2.5.2.1 Sociability**

The condition I propose as *sociability* has two parts. The first part of the requirement is to mandate any contemporary feminist account of autonomy to subsume a view of the self

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<sup>155</sup> Marilyn Friedman and Angela Bolte, 'Ethics and Feminism', in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. By Eva Feder Kittay, Linda Martin Alcoff (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007) pp. 81-101, p. 90.

<sup>156</sup> Friedman, 'Autonomy and Social Relationships: Rethinking the Feminist Critique', p. 93.

as a social being, whose sociality has at the very least an *effect* on their autonomy<sup>157</sup>. At the very *minimum*, the framework should recognize that one's social environment plays a role in shaping one's autonomous capacities. Friedman points out how defenders of relational autonomy find individualistic conceptions of autonomy "antithetical to relational interpretations"<sup>158</sup>. On this point I think both minimally and maximally relational approaches are more or less in agreement. We must correct the vision of autonomy which presupposes that "other people function primarily as obstacles to the realization of an individual's plans or goals"<sup>159</sup>.

Now the concept of 'relational autonomy' suggests that relationality and autonomy are compatible and able to co-exist. But relationality in whatever form does not *necessarily* supply the antidote to hyper-individualistic views of autonomy – it must be relationality of an anti-perfectionist kind. Just as it would be a mistake to buy into the exaggerated picture of the atomistic individual, there are mistaken ways to adopt relationality as well. A feminist theory of autonomy must find a balance between the extreme versions of individuality and relationality.

John Christman articulates this concern by saying that some renditions of relational approaches "import a perfectionist view of human values into the account of autonomy and thereby threaten to undermine the usefulness of the concept in certain theoretical and practical contexts..."<sup>160</sup> He continues that relational theories that deny proceduralism (or content-neutrality) in fact support "a conception of autonomy which is an ideal of individualized self-government, an ideal that those who choose strict obedience or hierarchical power structures have decided to reject"<sup>161</sup>. He thinks it would be a mistake to substitute a strongly individualistic view of autonomy with an idealized version of relationality. This is because the latter can be an extreme as well: it suggests none of us can have 'relational' autonomy unless we live in a perfectly egalitarian world and hold the relevant preferences *not* to be subservient to others, for instance. In short, he warns that

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<sup>157</sup> As we observed in the previous section, there is some contention as to how minimal or maximal this view should be, but I believe the minimal view is a feasible starting point.

<sup>158</sup> Marilyn Friedman, 'Relational Autonomy and Independence' in *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*, ed. By Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 43.

<sup>159</sup> Kathryn Abrams, 'From Autonomy to Agency: Feminist Perspectives on Self-Direction', *William and Mary Law Review*, 40 (1999), 805-846 (p. 831).

<sup>160</sup> Christman, p. 146.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

relational approaches that treat social conditions as ‘definitive’ of autonomy carry a “...danger that autonomy-based principles of justice will exclude from participation those individuals who reject those types of social relations demanded by those views.”<sup>162</sup> Though I do not believe, as Christman does, that this perfectionist threat is due to rejection of proceduralism *per se*, nor that this is necessarily a widespread issue for relational approaches<sup>163</sup>, I agree that we must be careful not to claim that one can only be autonomous if they stand “in proper social relations to surrounding others”<sup>164</sup>. In short, we must be careful not to acknowledge relationality at the cost of acknowledging the possibility of autonomy within *imperfectly* egalitarian social relations.

### 2.5.2.2 Moral neutrality

Next, I propose a condition of moral neutrality. That is, a feminist account of autonomy ought not to conflate the idea of *morality* with autonomy. Though moral choices and autonomous choices often overlap, we must allow a distinction between them. *Prima facie*, it seems content-neutral renditions of relational theories are well-equipped for this (like Friedman’s view). Now it may seem puzzling as to why I do not suggest here a greater consonance between autonomy and morality. Since we have, so far, been touching upon oppression and issues of feminist justice, it seems problematic to espouse neutrality about the moral values subsumed in decision-making. But my insistence on moral neutrality is based on several pragmatic issues, which I explain below.

First, connecting morality with autonomy would run the risk of failing to distinguish between oppressors and those who internalize their oppression. On the one hand, if immoral choices were to be considered non-autonomous ones, we mistakenly lose with it the impetus to hold individuals responsible for their wrongdoings. This holds to the extent that autonomy is associated with a responsible self with ownership over their conduct. The term ‘non-autonomous’ naturally seems to imply the opposite: that the agent was not self-authorized, that their conduct was out of their hands, and so on. We must be careful not to let immoral conduct be characterized in this way, since it leads to a misdiagnosis of responsibility in the individual. It must be a desiderata of any autonomy theory, but especially a feminist

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>163</sup> Christman’s paper mainly targets the perfectionism of Marina Oshana’s relational approach to autonomy. I dedicate an entire chapter to Oshana’s account in Chapter Seven, so I say no more about it here.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

autonomy theory, to be able to hold oppressors responsible for their actions<sup>165</sup>, and an image of autonomy seems imperative to this earnest repudiation of conduct. If autonomy required adherence to moral standards (broadly construed), oppressors may be viewed as non-autonomous, leading us to this misdiagnosis of responsibility. The more elegant view seems to be to accept that immoral actions, and immoral persons, can be autonomous. Persons, we could say, are just as responsible for their autonomous immoral conduct as they are for their autonomous and morally abiding conduct. I believe it is this view that will preserve the emancipatory feminist value of autonomy.

On the other side, distancing the terms of autonomy from morality also allows us to avoid victim-blaming terminology of individuals who have internalized their oppression. My point is that separating the question of *how one ought to morally respond to one's own oppression* from the question of *how one is autonomous under oppression* will help to avoid implications that relate to burdensome moral blame of agents under oppression. In short, separating morality and autonomy enables us not to punish individuals who *struggle* to be autonomous by way of negative moral judgment.

### **2.5.2.3 Inclusivity**

The final anti-perfectionist condition I put forward here – the condition of inclusivity – follows quite naturally from the condition of content-analysis, sociability (i.e., anti-perfectionist relationality), and moral neutrality. The content-analysis condition posits that it is appropriate to draw differentiating boundaries on decision-making inputs, the sociability condition states that relational autonomy must be anti-perfectionist and allow for a reasonable degree of independence, and moral neutrality recommends that we separate questions of moral conduct from questions about autonomous conduct. All of these commitments raise the question of a practical boundary around autonomy; the specification of such conditions need to be balanced so as not to be too demanding, too wide, or too narrow.

Since a major departure point of feminist relational approaches is to think about autonomy as a qualified possibility under conditions like oppression, it is only reasonable that we expect a feminist account of autonomy to have successfully demonstrated this boundary of possibility. Our feminist re-haul of the traditional concept of autonomy won't mean much

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<sup>165</sup> See Chapter Five on Normative Competence for more discussion on morality and autonomy.

if not many women could actually live up to it, so our account should aim to be as inclusive as is reasonable. I am not suggesting here that the account must indiscriminately include all agents under oppression as autonomous, but rather that they must be able to demonstrate the means to adequately *justify* inclusions and exclusions of autonomy in the context of oppression.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

I hope to have shown in this chapter that autonomy is a valuable and useful concept for feminist thinkers. The central feminist concerns in the debate about personal autonomy explored in this chapter gave way to my suggestions of various commitments for a feminist account of autonomy. These included the content-analysis condition, and a trio of anti-perfectionist conditions, including sociability, moral neutrality, and inclusivity. It is with these conditions in mind that I form my own view of autonomy in later chapters.

# 3

## Multidimensional Approaches to Autonomy: Killmister and Mackenzie

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explicate two different approaches to autonomy that have been characterized as multidimensional by their authors. The first is Suzy Killmister's four-dimensional analysis, which subsumes four distinct dimensions under the headings of self-definition, self-realisation, self-unification, and self-constitution. The next theory I consider is Catriona Mackenzie's three-dimensional analysis of autonomy, which includes self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. While there are some overlaps between the two approaches, they diverge in a significant way: by differing with respect to the extent that the dimensions of autonomy are relationally construed, and by differing with respect to the normative applicability of the theories. Both conceptualizations contain important insights about autonomy and contain the resources to justify a move away from unidimensional accounts. However, I argue that Mackenzie's account is a preferable base structure for the purposes of my project. It is her framework of autonomy that will enable nuanced analyses of hard cases of autonomy and uphold the feminist values advocated in Chapter Two.

What I hope to have shown by the end of this chapter in favouring Mackenzie's approach is that a multidimensional theory must incorporate both internal and external facets of decision-making. This is a view I call the hybrid multidimensional approach. This is the view that will serve as the foundation on which I build my own multidimensional view, which I develop in the next chapter.

### 3.2 Suzy Killmister's four-dimensional account of autonomy

In this section I explicate Suzy Killmister's four-dimensional approach. Her original framework is spelled out in her book, *Taking the measure of autonomy: a four-dimensional theory of self-governance*. The entirety of her account is sophisticated, and I will be limited by space in doing justice to the more detailed terms of her framework. What I do hope to

achieve here is a simplified but accurate characterization of her account, which I use to level my reasons against using her approach as a basis for my own view.

The core of Suzy Killmister's four-dimensional theory of autonomy is the idea that there is a self at stake in ideas we have about 'being true to oneself'. This self, she says, is the self of self-governance. There are two ways that individuals have a self relevant to self-governance. First, agents have a personal identity. Personal identity makes agents individual selves. Secondly, agents have a self via the exercise of practical agency. This is the first-personal perspective by which an agent "engages in the task of living in the day to day"<sup>166</sup>. Agents govern through practical agency by engaging in practical deliberation and by forming intentions. Killmister clarifies that personal identity and practical agency are theoretically distinct insofar as they are "designed to facilitate analysis of the complexity of self-governance"<sup>167</sup>, but we need not think of them as disparate parts of the self. The four conditions that Killmister claims are dimensions of autonomy – self-definition, self-realization, self-unification, and self-constitution – pertain to the self of self-governance as described above.

Before I continue, I will survey Killmister's motivations in adopting this multidimensional approach. Her goal is to attend to the diverse uses and invocations of the concept of autonomy. To talk about autonomy, she says, is "to give a name to something that people are already implicitly tracking"<sup>168</sup>. Furthermore, she says, autonomy plays an integral role in discussion about several moral domains, like paternalism, moral responsibility, and consent. For instance, autonomy may be the value that paternalism offends. Consent seems invalid under certain conditions, like coercion – and autonomy is a baseline that helps us determine the validity of consent. Lastly, autonomy helps us make sense of moral responsibility – it seems like the way we hold others responsible depends on whether or not their actions are seen as deliberate and attributable to them, rather than involuntary or unintentional movements. We must resist the thought that there is more than one concept of autonomy in play in these different realms, because this view is both undesirable and unnecessary. She believes that conceptual disunity is undesirable because it 'obscures'

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<sup>166</sup> Suzy Killmister, 'Introduction', *Taking the measure of autonomy: a four-dimensional theory of self-governance* (New York: Routledge, 2018) pp. 3-18, p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

important connections between allegedly clashing conceptions of autonomy. For instance, if we think that the conception of autonomy in play in paternalism is different to the one in play for discussions about consent, we miss out on the commonalities between them: in both cases, acting in ways that are not true to themselves, or acting in ways that ‘don’t speak for them’ are cases of actions that fail to express who they are. And it is unnecessary to work with diverging conceptions if there is indeed a way to harmonize these conflicting ideas about autonomy: for Killmister, conceptual unity through a multidimensional approach makes the desired congruity possible.

She is correct to point out that confusion and disagreement over the conceptions of autonomy that are in play in discussions where autonomy is relevant can be alleviated with a nuanced and unified approach. In the following sections, I survey her view and suggest that while her view successfully unifies the idea of self-governance, it is not multidimensional in a way that captures the aims of my project, which is to advance a relational understanding of autonomy can explain a wide range of hard cases and which also heeds feminist commitments. As we shall see, none of her given dimensions are explicitly relational; this makes it challenging for her account to deliver verdicts sensitive to issues relating to the possibility of autonomy under oppression.

### 3.2.1 Self-definition

*Self-definition* is one of Killmister’s dimensions of self-governance. Self-governance involves committing oneself to doing something and to uphold that commitment. Commitments themselves are a broad category that can manifest as “varied phenomena as values, beliefs, practical deliberation, and intentions”<sup>169</sup>. So how does the self of self-governance come to *commit* in just the way described? For one, *self-defining attitudes* commit one’s personal identity to doing or being a certain way. Self-defining attitudes may include beliefs, goals, and values. If an agent comes to believe that *p*, for instance, she commits herself to a range of things. She is committed “to not taking on the belief that *not-p*; to not denying facts that are entailed by *p*; to treating *p* as true in her practical deliberation; and so forth”<sup>170</sup>. Similarly, if one forms a goal to *a*, she is committed to a range of things, such as forming plans that facilitate the realization of *a*, to not form plans that clash with *a*,

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



and so forth. Values are different in that they pick out “clusters of cares and concerns” – which often include self-governing policies – that the agent has taken on “concerning who she is to be, what she is to do, and how she is to respond to the world”<sup>171</sup>. She takes these self-defining attitudes to “contain the necessary normativity to underpin autonomy”<sup>172</sup>, in a way that other features of one’s personal identity, like memories or one’s social relations, does not. The dimension of self-definition measures “the extent to which an agent’s personal identity coheres with her self-defining attitudes”<sup>173</sup>.

For an agent to be fully autonomous, Killmister claims, her personal identity must uphold the commitments generated by her self-defining attitudes. This means her personal identity must cohere. If an agent has beliefs that conflict with her self-governing policies, she will to that extent fail to be autonomous (though not all clashes will diminish agents’ autonomy to the same level). Coherence is required because self-defining attitudes involve commitments that have a normative status: they “bind the agent to do and be certain things, including adopting or revising other self-defining attitudes”<sup>174</sup>. So if the agent took on goals that clashed with her values, for instance, she would to that extent fail to be fully self-defined and fail to be fully autonomous. The greater ‘load’ a self-defining attitude bears on an agent’s personal identity, the greater damage to autonomy they will incur when they fail to uphold the commitments generated by them. So this is her condition of *self-definition*, which is a measure of local autonomy.

### 3.2.2 Self-realisation

Self-definition was about commitments the agent takes on that cohere with her personal identity. *Self-realisation* is about commitments that the agent takes on “within the domain of practical agency”<sup>175</sup>. This domain is the self as “she experiences affective states, as she interprets her environment, and as she deliberates and acts”<sup>176</sup>. The aspects of practical agency relevant for autonomy are *practical deliberation* and *intending*. When an agent engages in practical deliberation, she weighs up what she thinks she has most reason to do. Practical deliberation becomes normative to the agent when it generates commitments when

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

the agent resolves what is to be done. It has normative force because it isn't simply a "product of merely idle speculation"<sup>177</sup>, but constitutes the agent's own answer to the practical issue of what she should do.

Killmister distinguishes between *internal* self-realization and *external* self-realization. For *internal* self-realization, we consider how the conclusion of practical deliberation generates commitments. Consider one way someone might fail internal self-realization: take an agent who deliberates about whether to see *La La Land* or *Moonlight* at the cinema. She sees some reasons in favour of *La La Land* (as a fun movie), but decides that she has the most reason to see *Moonlight*, as "its bleak social realism promises to be morally edifying"<sup>178</sup>. However, this agent forms instead the intention to see *La La Land* rather than *Moonlight*, which Killmister takes to be an example of *akrasia* as the agent "succumbs to temptation, and decides to act contrary to how she has deemed she ought to act"<sup>179</sup>. Though the agent is committed to seeing *Moonlight* on the basis of her practical deliberation, she nonetheless forms an intention to see *La La Land*, and thus fails to be internally self-realizing.

Killmister helpfully provides us with a few other ways that internal self-realization might be diminished. One manner in which the agent could fail to sustain commitments generated by her practical deliberation is if she is motivated by considerations she has 'bracketed'. Bracketing involves a refusal "to treat a desire as a reason for action".<sup>180</sup> For example, a devoutly religious agent might deliberate about sexual desires that she believes are devilish temptations. Even if she is tempted to carry out those desires, "given her beliefs about the origin of these desires"<sup>181</sup>, they are rejected as having any reason-giving force in her deliberative process.

Next, we have *external* self-realisation, which is concerned with the link between 'intending and acting'. External self-realisation is about "commitments one takes on in virtue of intending in the service of acting"<sup>182</sup>. As such, an external component is introduced: the

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin, review of *Taking the Measure of Autonomy: A Four-Dimensional Theory of Self-Governance*, by Suzy Killmister, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (2018),

agent's autonomy in this case is a matter of "the effect she has on the world around her"<sup>183</sup>. The most straightforward example of a failure of external self-realisation would be physical intervention. But there are many more interesting cases where external self-realisation is reduced but not totally destroyed. Killmister brings up the example of Becky the vegetarian, who mistakenly orders a 'lasagne al pollo', believing this to be a mushroom lasagne. Becky thus intends to eat a vegetarian lasagne but ends up eating a chicken lasagne<sup>184</sup>. To consider how externally self-realizing any given act is, we must ask the question of "which intentional commitments does the action fail to uphold?"<sup>185</sup>. Killmister takes three types of intentional commitments to be relevant to answer this question. These are: commitments concerning the *reasons* for which the action is performed, commitments concerning the way in which the action is to be *brought about*, and lastly, commitments concerning the various *descriptions* under which the intended action falls<sup>186</sup>.

Often we commit ourselves to perform actions for particular reasons. In such cases, merely doing the action is insufficient to fulfil the intentional commitments involved. The action must be performed for the relevant reason. Killmister brings up the example of an agent who intends to donate a part of her income to charity to fulfil a duty of benevolence, but ends up bringing herself to make the donation for a different reason – "a passive-aggressive desire to make her partner feel guilty"<sup>187</sup>. In this case, the action is not fully autonomous because though the agent upholds her commitment to donate to charity, she fails to uphold her commitment to donate out of benevolence.

Next, she considers 'deviant causal chains' to illustrate the possibility that the way the agent's actions are *caused* might be relevant for autonomy. Deviant causal chains suggest that "it is not enough for an intention to cause a particular motion"<sup>188</sup> for the motion to really count as the agent's action, because one can cause motion in the wrong manner. She brings up the example of a nervous first-time assassin. This assassin forms the intention to shoot, target in sight, but contemplating that she is intending to kill for the first time startles her so

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<<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/taking-the-measure-of-autonomy-a-four-dimensional-theory-of-self-governance/>>

<sup>183</sup> Killmister, p. 39.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

much that she accidentally pulls the trigger, shooting the target. It seems that while “the intention caused the corresponding bodily movement”<sup>189</sup>, it should not quite count as full-blown action. Killmister takes a permissive approach in this case. She claims there are “no universal claims” that can be made regarding “what does and doesn’t count as autonomy-undermining deviant causation”<sup>190</sup>. The kinds of ‘causal pathways’ that are seen to undermine autonomy will depend on what the agent’s intentional commitments are. An action can be autonomous “provided the causal pathway does not violate an intentional commitment”<sup>191</sup>. Furthermore, agents can have stronger or weaker commitments regarding the causes of their actions. On one end they may have no commitments regarding *how* an action should be brought about. In that case, the fact that an action is brought about by a ‘deviant causal chain’ has no effect on the autonomy of that action.

One thing we might do is to ask whether an agent would view her actions as successful if its causal pathways were known to her. Killmister brings up the example of intending to make a dentist appointment. If she realized the next day that her mother already made the appointment for her, she would “not consider this a successful realisation of [her] intention (and will probably resent the intervention to boot)”<sup>192</sup>. However, if an agent with a physical disability indicates to her carer that she intends to make a dentist appointment, “she may well consider it a successful execution of that intention if the carer calls...on her behalf”<sup>193</sup>. In this way her theory allows for physically disabled agents to carry out autonomous actions, since what matters on her account is not that the relevant “psychological states exert the requisite kind of guidance control over the execution of the action”<sup>194</sup>, but rather that the agent’s intentional commitments are compatible with the help of others.

Finally, we might consider the range of descriptions under which the agent is committed to acting<sup>195</sup>. If an agent is not committed to acting under “any of the descriptions that are true of movement she performs”<sup>196</sup> then she is not autonomous. Tripping on the sidewalk is an example of this – it is akin to happenstance rather than action. Once there is at

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

least some description under which the agent is committed to acting that is true of the action she performs we are in the realm of action.

### 3.2.3 Self-unification

So far, we've considered self-definition, which concerns personal identity, and self-realisation, which concerns practical agency. *Self-unification* measures "the extent to which the agent within each domain upholds the commitments she has taken on within the other domain"<sup>197</sup>. So the commitments the agent takes on through her personal identity need to be upheld by her practical agency, and the commitments the agent takes on through her practical agency need to be upheld by her personal identity.

Killmister claims that "commitments taken up through the agent's personal identity offer a check on the agent's practical deliberation, which goes beyond what is required by self-realisation."<sup>198</sup> What the agent takes to be reason-giving should cohere with the commitments they hold in virtue of their self-defining attitudes. She says that if an agent commits herself to act a certain way in compliance with her self-defining attitudes but this conflicts with how she commits herself to act in virtue of her actual practical deliberation, then "no matter what she does, she will be failing to uphold some commitment or other"<sup>199</sup>. So if she upholds the commitments generated by her self-defining attitude, she will be failing to uphold the commitment of her practical deliberation, which reduces self-realisation. If she upholds the commitments generated by her practical deliberation she necessarily fails to uphold the commitments borne of her self-defining attitudes, reducing self-unification. Thus, "such a bind can only be avoided by ensuring that the commitments one takes on across both domains cohere"<sup>200</sup>.

There are four aspects of the agent's practical agency over which the commitments of self-unification range. These are *practical deliberation*, *action*, *affective response*, and *perceptual experience*. We might fail to uphold commitments concerning what is to be treated as a reason, by failing to notice the relevant reasons<sup>201</sup>. The example Killmister gives is of Harriet's valuing of her friendship with Bianca, which involves a policy of treating

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

Bianca's needs as *pro tanto* reasons for action. But if Harriet fails to recognize when Bianca is asking for help, she fails to accord her friend's needs in her practical deliberation, which renders her less self-unified.

Next, we have action. Take an agent who values self-preservation and therefore has a policy of never deliberately putting herself in situations that will risk her life. However, on a trip to the Northern Territory of Australia<sup>202</sup>, this agent decides to take up a friend's dare: to swim in a crocodile infested waterhole. She dives into the waterhole to impress her friend; but because this action conflicts with her policy of self-preservation, she is less self-unified.

Furthermore, the agent may have self-defining attitudes that commit her to certain "affective responses or perceptual experiences"<sup>203</sup>. For instance, an agent who values a friendship may also commit to not experience envy if the agent's friend shares good news. An agent with the 'wrong' affective states will experience diminished self-unification if they fail to uphold the value of their friendship. There are also ways that our perceptual experiences commit us<sup>204</sup>. For example, an agent may have a self-governing policy that commit them to perceive in accordance with belief. Say an agent holds the belief that the tall observation deck they have come to visit is completely safe, yet cannot help but sense that the deck floor is shaky. If she holds a self-governing policy that generate commitments which block these sorts of clashes, she may be less self-unified in experiencing the world in this discordant way.

She also addresses what kind of commitments the agent might take up through her practical agency that place demands on her personal identity<sup>205</sup>. In this case, to the extent that the agent "forms an intention to change any aspect of her personal identity, then she is committed to effecting those changes"<sup>206</sup>. She brings up the example of an agent in an oppressive society who might come to realize that he holds a problematic belief that should be abandoned – for instance "that men are intellectually superior to women"<sup>207</sup>. He must then form an intention to rid himself of that belief.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

### 3.2.4 Self-constitution

Finally, *self-constitution* supplements the other dimensions by measuring “the extent to which an agent is in the business of taking on commitments”<sup>208</sup>, rather than measuring the extent to which the agent upholds the commitments she already has. Self-constitution tracks how the agent is “engaged in taking on the kinds of commitments whose successful fulfilment is measured by self-definition, self-realisation, and self-unification”<sup>209</sup>. It differs from the aforementioned dimensions in that it is a ‘global’, rather than ‘local’, measure of autonomy: it takes into account the agent in a holistic fashion, rather than measuring particular instances of their attitudes or actions.

Killmister says that “insofar as self-constitution is concerned with personal identity, it is concerned with the extent to which the agent takes on self-defining attitudes”<sup>210</sup>. As for practical agency, self-constitution is “concerned with the extent to which the agent engages in practical deliberation and intention formation”<sup>211</sup>. Finally, self-constitution is “concerned with the extent to which the agent is able to connect the two roles of her self; this ensures that the self of self-governance is at least minimally unified”<sup>212</sup>.

For an agent to be self-constituting to a minimal degree and thereby qualify as autonomous, she proposes three conditions they must meet. First, the agent must have a ‘non-empty set’ of self-defining attitudes which place constraints on the kind of person it is appropriate for her to be. Next, she must be disposed to exercise practical agency, meaning that she must have the capacity for practical deliberation and be willing to engage with it; she must also be able to form intentions and have a disposition to form them under practical deliberative circumstances. The agent must also take the outcome of their practical agency ‘seriously’. Finally, the agent must be able to unify the two domains of her self.

She says that self-constitution is a substantive dimension in the sense that it is concerned with the ‘quality’ of one’s commitments. It considers whether the agent is “sufficiently demanding of herself, constituting a robust personal identity and fully engaging in exercises of practical agency”<sup>213</sup>. As an example of someone who might have low self-

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

constitution, she brings up the case of an agent whose beliefs, values, and goals were “directed at the simple end of survival”<sup>214</sup>. An agent like this would be “less engaged in the business of constituting herself *as* a self than an agent whose beliefs, values, and goals were directed at managing a complex of ends, such as pursuit of a career, extending her knowledge of the world, and developing loving relationships with friends and family”<sup>215</sup>. A person focused solely on survival has a stunted personal identity. Someone with high self-constitution, by contrast, have an “expansive and weighty set of self-defining attitudes; they will take seriously the demands of practical agency, seeking to discover the reasons that apply to them...they will be oriented towards ensuring unity between who they are and what they do”<sup>216</sup>.

### 3.3 Limitations of Killmister’s four-dimensional analysis

Killmister differentiates her account from ‘relational’ approaches, taking Marina Oshana’s framework as a comparative reference. On Oshana’s account we “cannot be autonomous if we stand in dominating relationships with others, where non-domination is understood in a modal sense...”<sup>217</sup>. Killmister denies that her theory is constitutively relational in this sense, insisting that it is ‘instrumentally’ relational. She is concerned more with what we *do* to be autonomous, which she claims “makes no essential reference to other agents”<sup>218</sup>.

There are several reasons I do not draw on Killmister’s account for my own multidimensional framework. These reasons are not meant to deny the merits of her view, which offers a comprehensive account of self-governance. My principal concerns, outlined in more detail below, are that Killmister’s theory is not relational enough for my purposes in two senses. The fact that she makes no essential reference to relational conditions means that discussion about the external conditions of oppression, and considerations of justice, are circumvented – agents’ autonomy is assessed in terms of internal damage only. Next, the comments Killmister does have to offer about the problem of oppression leads her to the suggestion that agents’ can ameliorate damage to their autonomy through *compliance* to the terms of their oppression, which places the onus of recovering autonomy strictly on the agent.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 87.



Detailing these issues here will help us anticipate conciliatory resources in Mackenzie's account, which I cover in section 3.4.

First, confining considerations about what makes autonomy possible to processes that occur *only* within the agent will limit our exploration how autonomy is affected by oppression. It seems to me to be more desirable for a theory of autonomy to be able to account for features of the agent's external environment and their relationship to the agent's autonomy. Rebekah Johnston's externalist view of autonomy can help highlight this desirability. Johnston points out that internalist views of autonomy are insufficient "for identifying the autonomy-inhibiting aspects of being a member of a partially subordinated social identity"<sup>219</sup> because they employ a 'damage model' of autonomy. To put it simply, such models frame the individual as *damaged* under oppressive circumstances, rather than looking at the environment as *damaging*.

The issue with the damage model, of which Killmister's account is an instance, is that it fails to consider constraint to autonomy that can issue from the fact that others are permitted to embody traits that subjugate others. Johnston says that even if an agent has not incurred relevant internal damage (e.g. damage to her range of autonomy competencies), their autonomy can still be under threat in this way. She claims that the "implicit social permissibility" that allows for members of subordinated identities to be positioned as "harassable, expendable, and criminal"<sup>220</sup> constitutes a threat to autonomy. But rather than suggesting that the oppressed *have* these characteristics, we should rather turn this around on the traits other people are permitted to have in society.

Thus, what needs analysing "is not in the oppressed subject but rather attaches to members of superordinate identities"<sup>221</sup>. This is important because it allows us to avoid victim-blame, which internalist accounts, including Killmister's approach, may be prone to do due to its utilization of the damage model. Moving away from the damage model will allow us to frame the problem in terms of the leniency, tolerance, or even encouragement granted to those who assume social identities that enforce denigrating ascriptions on others.

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<sup>219</sup> Rebekah Johnston, 'Personal Autonomy, Social Identity, and Oppressive Social Contexts', *Hypatia*, 32 (2007), 312-328 (p. 313).

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

Now I am not suggesting that we fully adopt Johnston's view. If anything, her view seems to go the other way by depending purely on facts about external constraint to explain individual autonomous status. She claims that, for instance, to the extent that men and cis-gendered straight people are permitted to be "harassers of women and trans subjects"<sup>222</sup>, women and trans subjects are ascribed the status of being harassable<sup>223</sup>. However, this makes autonomous status ambiguous for those who are permitted to be harassers in some sense but are also harassable in other senses. And because Johnston treats this view as a kind of externalist condition, we have to set aside the agent's individual perspective: as long as one lives in a damaging environment, one will always be 'damageable'. But this should not worry us – my point was simply to identify one way in which Killmister's multidimensional approach is limited in its scope of analysis. Killmister's account is prone to treat threats to autonomy with the view that the damage necessarily takes place inside the agent, without taking into account the possibly damaging environment outside the agent; as such it circumvents relevant relational considerations.

Recall section 3.2.2 on self-realization, where Killmister claimed that her view would allow people with physical disabilities to form intentional commitments compatible with support in her relational environment, *contra* traditional views of action which marry psychological states with control. This allows us to recognize that people with physical disabilities can be individually self-realizing by relational proxy. The dimension of external self-realization, then, seems to be the closest Killmister gets to a 'relational' component. Her envisioning of the matter, however, seems overly idealistic and individualistic. The example she supplies seems to apply to persons who *have* a carer in the first place, who maintain a dynamic and communicative relationship with their carer, are regarded as legally competent, are not subject to coercion or undue manipulation, and so on. Even where these factors hold, however, we cannot avoid normative questions regarding practical environmental provisions relevant for external self-realization. There are ongoing debates, for instance, about proxy decision-making for individuals with disabilities. The *substituted* decision-making model, for instance, enables a proxy (e.g. a court-appointed guardian) to make decisions on behalf of someone who is legally regarded as incompetent. On the *supported* decision-making model,

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

self-advocacy and personal involvement is emphasized<sup>224</sup>. The individual would receive help from trusted individuals or entities to make and communicate their decisions. A person who is supported in this way would receive person-specific aid<sup>225</sup> (e.g. an individual with a learning disability might receive help with reading) for decision-making. These models are examples of competing approaches to decision-making for individuals with disabilities. At this point in the discussion, however, we have invoked *normative* questions about ‘relational’ provisions – provisions crucial for considerations about justice – that might be appropriate to raise as part of the discussion. So it is surprising that Killmister did not frame her discussion in the context of something like supported decision-making – on which the individual’s wills and their relational provisions are interdependent for successful decision-making – which shares an affinity with her view. One could counter that this is a non-problem for Killmister’s account, since normative questions about just provisions can be kept separate from questions of autonomy. As we will see in later sections, however, *not* being neutral with respect to social-environmental conditions will be a draw of an autonomy theory.

The second sense in which Killmister’s account is not relational enough is revealed in her suggestions regarding how one might restore autonomy in response to oppression. Killmister suggests that it is possible to counter the damage done to one’s autonomy through oppressive socialization (and related external threats) if agents themselves change their commitments to align with the identity that imposes these restrictions. While it may be an affront to our integrity to enact this change, it is not necessarily problematic for our autonomy to do so. In this case, she says, we would do better to accept that our intuitions are wrong, and that oppression is in fact compatible with autonomy given the possibility of self-altered commitments.

Now Killmister goes to some lengths to account for ways that oppression *does* damage autonomy. She considers five ways that oppression tends to negatively affect agents’ autonomy in particular: through systematic threats of violence, material deprivations, the creation of double binds, interpretive injustice, and implicit biases<sup>226</sup>. For Killmister, the last

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<sup>224</sup> Windsor C. Schmidt, ‘Proxy Decision-Making: A Legal Perspective’, in *The Law and Ethics of Dementia*, ed. By Charles Foster, Jonathan Herring, Israel Doron, (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2014) pp. 311-326, (p. 319).

<sup>225</sup> Nandini Devi, ‘Moving towards substituted or supported decision-making? Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’, *European Journal of Disability Research*, 5 (2011), 249–264 (p. 255).

<sup>226</sup> Killmister, p. 143.

aspect, implicit bias, is seen as damaging the autonomy of agents who actually *benefit* from oppressive structures, so I will focus instead on the mechanisms of autonomy-impairment that affect people *under* oppression – and what Killmister takes these mechanisms to have in common. The general idea is that mechanisms of oppression make one or more of the dimensions of autonomy difficult or impossible to achieve. Take, for instance, an agent placed in a double bind. One is in a double bind when they are faced with a decision “either side of which subjects her to some form of sanction or frustration”<sup>227</sup>. If a police officer puts an agent in a position of either subservience or subjection to violence, for instance, the agent is in a double bind. She brings up the case of Trayvon Martin’s death in 2012, and Geraldo Rivera’s notorious claim that “the hoodie Martin was wearing was as responsible for his death as George Zimmerman”<sup>228</sup>. Rivera went on to encourage parents to stop their children from leaving the house wearing hoodies. When agents respond to “systematic threats of violence by refraining from horseplay, changing their wardrobe...they risk damaging their self-unification”<sup>229</sup>. Killmister claims that the extent of this damage will, of course, depend on whether the agent holds beliefs, goals, and values “with which such behavioural modifications conflict”<sup>230</sup>.

But if this is the case, it seems like the fix is for agents to adapt their commitments “to reflect the norms and expectations imposed on them”<sup>231</sup>. This view is reflected in Killmister’s response to the issue of manipulation, an analogous problem. She says: “If all that is needed for an agent to be considered highly autonomous is that she takes on commitments, and then successfully upholds those commitments, then an agent who has been subject to brainwashing or other forms of extreme manipulation could in principle qualify as highly autonomous”<sup>232</sup>. Killmister bites the bullet: she says it is possible to construct cases in which a manipulated agent meet all the conditions for autonomy and that we would “do better to reject our intuitions and accept the full autonomy of these manipulated agents”<sup>233</sup>. This maps on to the worry about oppression.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

In my view, the issue of oppression still poses a problem for Killmister because she relies on the assumption that mechanisms of oppression necessarily involve *struggles* to self-unify. Struggle implies that mechanisms of oppression invariably generate unacceptable costs to individual self-unity. But this fails to explain why the intuition of non-autonomy is not sated in the rare cases where adaptation is complete (that is, profoundly internalized by the agent). If anything, complete adaptation seems even *more* problematic than cases where agents struggle to self-unify. If ‘wholesale reconfiguration of the self’ is indeed theoretically possible, Killmister would be committed to saying that oppression did not damage the agent’s autonomy after all, conceding that agents under oppression “could in fact protect their autonomy through a process of adapting...provided that process was sufficiently thorough”<sup>234</sup>. But it seems counterintuitive to claim that the more complete the revision, the higher the agent’s autonomy. I believe this concession can be avoided if we posit more substantively that, internal integration notwithstanding, there are impositions generated by mechanisms of oppression that are in and of themselves damaging to autonomy by degrees. Instead of saying, for instance, that that double binds damage autonomy because the agents are essentially forced to fail to self-unify, we can say that the fact that double binds are externally sanctioned in the first place is a relational precarity problematic for autonomy.

Killmister’s suggestion that protecting autonomy at the expense of integrity constitutes the implausibility of oppression as compatible with autonomy is also problematic. She takes the case of agents who “deliberately revise their values in order to ease the burden of oppression”<sup>235</sup>. She accepts that this wholesale revision is compatible with autonomy, but says it is contrary to the “demands of integrity”, which would require that an agent hold fast to their core values even in the face of “pressure to capitulate”<sup>236</sup>. By contrast, autonomy requires a wider array of commitments to be upheld than just the core ones, and so allows for agents to revise their commitments. Yet if integrity as she has characterized it can come apart from autonomy, it looks like the problem with oppression is about how it damages personal integrity rather than autonomy, which seems implausible. Furthermore, permitting this latitude for the category of autonomy will weaken her response to the problem of oppression,

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 154

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

since it seems possible for people to undergo *prudential* wholesale change, and possibly even a *self-deceived* shift of commitments, without violating autonomy at all.

I will illustrate a third point about integrity with the example of a resilient individual. Say we have a resilient individual who has adopted the idea that willing to appease authority in difficult situations is a prudent thing to do. As such it is part of their personal and practical identity to arrange their commitments around the trait of astuteness in such situations. This individual, at their workplace, makes a point of not stepping on anyone's toes, letting slide denigratory and sexist comments aimed at her, and so on. But this agent does not interpret 'playing along' as a resentful experience of internal conflict. She simply treats such events as opportunities to shrewdly and adeptly navigate hazards typical of her (or *any*) workplace. As such, she doesn't lose her integrity – her core commitments – as a person, since the ways of doing and being to which she has committed herself justifies such a response. On Killmister's account, this seems to be a case where *neither* a sacrifice of integrity or autonomy has occurred (at least *prima facie*), and was not the result of a 'wholesale revision' of the self. But it seems quite clear here that some part of her autonomy is still threatened. This is not because of ways that the environment is skewing her self-imposed commitments, but because her social standing tests her commitments this way in the first place.

Overall, I hope to have shown that my main reservations about adopting Killmister's multidimensional approach has to do with its limited scope, which has three effects: it limits analysis of autonomy to specific facets of self-governance, it sets aside wider questions to do with social provisions for autonomy, and it suggests that compliance to oppression is compatible with autonomy on the basis that one can self-govern with respect to oppressive norms.

### **3.4 Catriona Mackenzie's three-dimensional account of autonomy**

Having rejected Suzy Killmister's multidimensional model of autonomy, I now assess Catriona Mackenzie's three-dimensional analysis of autonomy. Catriona Mackenzie's account identifies "three distinct, but causally interdependent, dimensions or axes of autonomy: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization"<sup>237</sup>. Mackenzie adds that the exercise of autonomy along her three axes can be 'assessed at different levels', and

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<sup>237</sup> Catriona Mackenzie, 'Three Dimensions of Autonomy' in *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*, ed. By Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 15-41, p. 15.

distinguishes between the local level (at which we assess autonomy with respect to individual choices), the programmatic level (which assesses domains of an individual's life), and the global level (the assessment of a person's life overall). This makes it possible for autonomy to be exercised locally even if an agent's autonomy overall was affected. Again, this is an idea the Killmister's account also allows for – it is possible for one to exercise local autonomy at the cost of global autonomy, and vice versa. In contrast to Killmister's account, however, Mackenzie is keen to develop explicitly *relational* understandings of her three axes, and in so doing provide a “detailed analysis of the commitments and aims of relational autonomy”<sup>238</sup>. She claims that her multidimensional taxonomy can make sense of our “complex, and sometimes conflicting, intuitions about autonomy and out diverse autonomy-related social practices”<sup>239</sup>. She continues that this conceptual mapping will, hopefully, “resolve some of the talking at cross-purposes in the literature that arises from understanding autonomy as the unitary concept of self-governance”<sup>240</sup>. I believe Mackenzie's account is quite successful on this front, and I will show that it contains the resources to overcome the issues I discussed in section 3.3.

### 3.4.1 Self-determination

The first dimension of Mackenzie's account is self-determination. This dimension introduces external conditions excluded in Killmister's discussion of autonomy. This is the condition of “having the freedom and opportunities to make and enact choices of practical import to one's life”<sup>241</sup>. The axis of self-determination, then, will help us explain how “structural (social and political) constraints can undermine or impair individual autonomy”<sup>242</sup>. Mackenzie says that the self-determination dimension of autonomy is “typically a practical precondition for autonomy as self-governance, and securing the conditions for self-determination is a matter of basic justice”<sup>243</sup>.

This idea is one that was only implicitly suggested in Killmister's account, since on Killmister's view it is possible to talk meaningfully of autonomy without reference to

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

external factors. I am more sympathetic to Mackenzie's highlighting of the direct relational bearing that external structural conditions may have on autonomy, as it then opens up more detailed discussion on *what* kind of freedom and opportunity conditions are needed. The self-determination axis immediately addresses the partially externally determined nature of autonomy, and as such makes Mackenzie's multidimensional theory one that contains an essentially external – that is, relational – component.

### 3.4.1.1 Freedom and opportunity conditions

Mackenzie specifies freedom conditions as “political and personal liberties that are necessary for leading a self-determining life”<sup>244</sup>. *Political* liberties can include “the kinds of liberties that all liberal, democratic, and feminist theorists think should be protected”<sup>245</sup>, like freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of religious exercise, and so on. As for *personal* liberties, she includes freedom of movement, freedom of sexual expression, and freedom from “all forms of coercion, manipulation, exploitation, and violence”<sup>246</sup>, though she notes there will be dispute over what counts as coercion, and so on. *Opportunity* conditions as Mackenzie refers to them “specify the kinds of opportunities that need to be available to agents in their social environments for them to have choices about what to value who to be, and what to do”<sup>247</sup>.

Now while Mackenzie thinks there will be agreement among liberal, democratic, and feminist theorists about the personal liberties listed above, she criticises the “libertarian position” that “equates autonomy with negative liberty and mere preference satisfaction”<sup>248</sup>. She points out that freedom and opportunity conditions overlap, but can also be in tension, pointing out that theorists who interpret freedom as negative liberty interpret freedom quite expansively. Theorists who emphasize “substantive equality of opportunity”, however, espouse the view that “which freedom conditions count as important will be determined by the opportunity conditions for self-determination”<sup>249</sup>, and Mackenzie aligns her own view with this interpretation.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 27.



Mackenzie, however, says that feminist interpretations of capabilities theory spell out a more “useful vocabulary for articulating opportunity conditions for self-determination”<sup>250</sup>. Capabilities is a metric of equality that “disaggregates distinct dimensions of well-being and human development”<sup>251</sup>. Examples of capabilities generated by feminist capability theorists like Elizabeth Anderson and Ingrid Robeyns include things like health, education, well-being, safety, respect, and so on. Though Mackenzie does not attach herself to any list or weigh in on the debate over coming up with such a list, she says that the lists of capabilities discussed by Anderson and Robeyns help identify the kinds of opportunity conditions required for self-determination<sup>252</sup>.

Mackenzie believes that the capabilities approach spells out very clearly how securing opportunity conditions for self-determination is really a matter of justice. This has the effect of connecting the idea of autonomy as self-determination with actual social and political “constraining and enabling conditions of self-determination”<sup>253</sup>. And, much like the relational autonomy theorist’s interests, capability theorists are attentive to the role that the social environment has to play in “enabling or constraining individual self-determination”<sup>254</sup>.

### 3.4.2 Self-governance

Next we have *self-governance*, which picks out conditions that are internal to the individual, whereas self-determination was about identifying *external* structural conditions. She does point out, however, that the internal/external distinction is not straightforward, since external conditions can shape the process of our “practical identity formation” and be part of “the development of skills and competences required for governing the self”<sup>255</sup>.

#### 3.4.2.1 Authenticity conditions

Mackenzie says self-governance is picked out through *authenticity* conditions and *competence* conditions. Authenticity conditions define self-governance by recourse to the agent’s motivational structures – which can include choice, value, or commitment – that can be identified as belonging to the agent.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

She mentions that relational theorists are sceptical about the authenticity conditions posed by hierarchical or endorsement conceptions of autonomy, which analyse authenticity in terms of “structural features of an agent’s will at the time of choice or action”<sup>256</sup>. This is because, first, authenticity criteria that “appeal to relations of internal coherence”<sup>257</sup> fail to account for historical factors in practical identity formation, which will mean that it fails to account for the way oppression shapes practical identities and motivational structures like preferences, values, and cares. Second, such criteria seem to rule out ambivalence, fragmentation, or internal psychic conflict as incompatible with self-governance, which it is argued is unrealistic since some degree of any of the aforementioned are “inescapable aspects of practical identity formation”<sup>258</sup>.

Mackenzie does not reject authenticity conditions altogether, but rather favours John Christman’s understanding of authenticity as “non-alienation upon (historically sensitive, adequate) self-reflection, given one’s diachronic practical identity and one’s position in the world”<sup>259</sup>. She believes this account is able to resolve the criticisms outlined above, and says no more about her acceptance of Christman’s account.

#### **3.4.2.2 The competence condition for self-governance**

Mackenzie then goes on to talk about ‘competence conditions’, which specify the range of competences or skills a person must possess to be self-governing. These include cognitive skills that range from “minimally specified capacities to understand and process information, to more complex capacities for critical reflection and reasons responsiveness”<sup>260</sup>, as well as volitional skills like self-control and decisiveness. Competence conditions, in my view, are more general than authenticity conditions, which specifically are meant to track the agent’s ‘self’ that can speak for their actions and choices. Mackenzie points out that ‘autonomy skills’ identified by relational theorists overlap with several items on Martha Nussbaum’s list of capabilities, which include sense, imagination and thought, emotion, practical reason, and affiliation (affiliation involves being able to live with others and having a social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation, being able to be treated as a dignified being of equal moral worth)<sup>261</sup>.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Mackenzie takes this aspect to fall under the category of self-authorization.

Mackenzie finds it surprising that Nussbaum insists her capabilities approach exclude the value of autonomy. Nussbaum has a few reasons for this. The first is that even if the capability of practical reason, for instance, is central to a dignified human life and raises “claims of justice against the state to provide the kind of educational opportunities that enable the development of this capability”<sup>262</sup>, people who possess the capability can refrain from exercising it. Autonomy, on the other hand, is something Nussbaum sees as necessarily an ‘exercise concept’. Mackenzie finds this quite implausible and suggests rather that individuals exercise the capacity for practical reason (i.e. self-governance) to greater or lesser degrees, “sometimes by choice, but often because their social environment has not supported the development of the relevant competences”<sup>263</sup>. Secondly, Nussbaum believes a commitment to the value of autonomy may be inconsistent with religious commitment. She says: “Autonomy thus means something positive, that one gives oneself laws and engages in critical reflection; but it also means something negative, that one denies that God is a necessary part of the justification of moral claims.”<sup>264</sup> Mackenzie believes Nussbaum has taken a mistaken view of autonomy here – one that is too restrictive of external authority. In Chapter Four I will discuss issues about the relationship between autonomy and capabilities in greater detail.

### **3.4.3 Self-authorization**

*Self-authorization* is regarding oneself as one who is authorized to exercise self-determination and self-governance in the scope of one’s life. For Mackenzie, self-authorization is defined by three conditions: the accountability condition, the self-evaluative attitudes condition, and the social recognition condition. These are interrelated facets that fall under self-authorization. I survey these below.

#### **3.4.3.1 The accountability condition**

The first aspect of self-authorization is accountability. This is to regard oneself as ‘responsible to oneself’, and as answerable to others for one’s beliefs, values, commitments, and reasons. Mackenzie more or less adopts Andrea Westlund’s dialogical answerability

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

account. On Westlund's account, an agent is autonomous if they have a disposition to hold themselves answerable.

It looks like including this accountability condition may give us the resources to explain the problem of oppression, perhaps in a clearer sense than the previous dimension of authenticity conditions for self-governance. Westlund believes that cases of what she calls deep deference or depression-based resignation are distinctive because of the way these "psychological conditions insulate agents from any real engagement in critical dialogue... When we exclaim "But that's the depression talking, not you!"... we are flagging a significant failure of responsiveness to ordinary, interpersonal justificatory demands"<sup>265</sup>. While resistance to these demands may just be due to a lack of confidence about one's grasp of practical reasons<sup>266</sup>, Westlund says that "intransigence in the face of external, critical challenge is an excellent candidate for what it is to be gripped by a practical perspective rather than self-governing in virtue of its guidance"<sup>267</sup>. Thus self-authorized agents need to be disposed to engage with critical feedback and take responsibility for their conduct.

#### **3.4.3.2 Self-evaluative attitudes**

Self-evaluative attitudes as Mackenzie refers to them involves a number of self-relating attitudes, like self-trust, self-esteem and self-respect. Mackenzie does not go into too much detail about what conceptions of these self-evaluative attitudes she abides by, so I will supply my own views about the link between certain self-regarding attitudes and autonomy in the next chapter. She does mention briefly the idea of self-respect as regarding oneself "as the moral equal of others, as having equal standing to have one's views and claims taken seriously"<sup>268</sup> and also talks about self-trust as 'basic self-confidence' that helps one to trust one's own convictions. Now these self-evaluative attitudes help us deliberate about what to do, since some element of 'self-interpretation' is involved. By thinking about what we have convictions about, what is valuable and important to us, what it means for us to live a life of self-respect, and so on, we are able to order our commitments and resolve how to attend to them.

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<sup>265</sup> Andrea C. Westlund, 'Autonomy in Relation', in *Out from the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*, ed. By Sharon L. Crasnow and Anita M. Superson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 60-79, p. 65.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Mackenzie, p. 37.

### 3.4.3.3 The social recognition condition

Finally, the social recognition condition rounds out the self-authorization axis. She follows Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth's recognitional model of autonomy, who claim that self-evaluative attitudes need to be validated by social recognition. Mackenzie claims that the social recognition condition is needed to help agents uphold their self-evaluative attitudes. While there are certainly "examples of heroic persons who hold appropriate self-evaluating attitudes even in situations where they are despised and humiliated by others"<sup>269</sup>, our self-evaluative attitudes are vulnerable to the way others recognize us. Inegalitarian power relations are often characterized by failures of recognition. Mackenzie points out that theorists of relational autonomy claim that "internalization of non- or misrecognition"<sup>270</sup> diminish individual self-regard, thus undermining the agent's sense of themselves as self-authorizing.

### 3.5 Mackenzie's account as a hybrid multidimensional approach

Now that I have overviewed Mackenzie's account, I will outline some advantages that Mackenzie's three-dimensional analysis has in terms of potential to address the difficulties that problematize Killmister's analysis. Recall how in section 3.3 I claimed that Killmister's account is not relational enough in several senses: first, by limiting analysis of autonomy to features of self-governance; second, by failing to comment on external provisions that might be relevant for autonomy; and finally, by suggesting restoration of autonomy under oppression has to do with internal compliance. By contrast, Mackenzie's account is a *hybrid* approach in that both internal (e.g. psychological self-governing commitments) and external (e.g. relational or social factors) components are included as dimensions of autonomy; I believe Mackenzie's approach is better equipped to deal with these issues.

Let us consider first how Mackenzie's approach opens up discussion about external relational provisions. Her self-determination axis was made up of freedom conditions, which stated personal rights and liberties that persons must be granted, as well as opportunity conditions, which she spelled out in terms of capability theory. While I do not endorse this move completely<sup>271</sup>, this focus contains the potential to generate meaningful discussion about external provisions that are relevant for individual autonomy. By explicitly listing the

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> For my critique, see Chapter Four.

liberties and opportunities that it is appropriate for the agent to be granted from the outside, some onus is placed on other and outside individuals, entities, and institutions to accord and equip the agent with certain entitlements or resources.

Next, Mackenzie's self-governance axis is considerably relational, as it involves authenticity conditions and competence conditions, which are both internal and external. In my view, Mackenzie's conception of self-governance is the aspect of her account most consonant with Killmister's view about self-governance. The authenticity conditions that form part of Mackenzie's self-governance axis deals with the authentication of local individual decisions, much like Killmister's elements of self-definition, self-realisation, and self-unification. The difference is that Killmister's account goes much more in-depth about what she takes self-governance to involve, but fails to explicitly introduce relational elements (with the exception of perhaps external self-realisation). Mackenzie follows Christman's approach for her 'authenticity' conditions, but posits that competence conditions are part of self-governance as well. Competence conditions are more general than authenticity conditions, and she follows Nussbaum's list of capabilities to imagine the sorts of skills we might need for self-governance. Not all of the skills Mackenzie discusses are explicitly relational (like self-control). Others, however, are essentially relational, such as affiliation which involves being able to live with others. Mackenzie's self-governance axis is not particularly illuminating relative to Killmister's approach of self-governance. What matters for our discussion, however, is that she does include self-governance *in addition to* other factors.

Next, her axis of self-authorization is also couched in relational terms. She explicitly states that self-authorization requires social recognition. That is, a person's self-regarding attitudes and dispositions must have an external uptake in order for them to fulfil the criteria of self-authorization. This way of spelling out the terms of self-authorization, then, makes explicit the fact that how we authorize our conduct is interdependent on social recognition. This conceptualization of self-authorization helps us diagnose threats to autonomy in ways that move beyond the damage model we considered in section 3.3. While we can say that the agent might experience lowered autonomy due to diminished self-authorizing attitudes such as self-esteem, we can also claim that this is in part due to *others* and the way the social environment is.

So Mackenzie's analysis involves greater relational elements overall. What difference does it make, and what advantages does this approach hold compared with Killmister's theory? Consider what Killmister says about material deprivation as a mechanism of oppression that threatens self-unification. She says that when agents do not have a "financial safety net" and face limited opportunities to earn a living wage, their "likelihood of undertaking commitment-compromising work is heightened"<sup>272</sup>. Thus, agents in this position are more vulnerable than others to setbacks – for instance their long-term goal of paying off a credit card can be thwarted by a medical emergency. For one's goals to be realized, material resources are crucial, both as "immediate means to the chosen end, but also as a buffer against contingencies"<sup>273</sup>. Killmister is certainly right to point out that deprivations on the outside matter in terms of serving as resources that make individual commitment-realizing possible. But if the reason the external conditions matter is for how well or badly they enable commitments to be realised, it is not clear that poverty has a distinctive normative status as an autonomy-undermining feature of oppression. Take, for instance, a person born into luxury and privilege, and whose commitments and goals in life match their materialistic lifestyle. It looks like if such an individual were to experience setbacks in their wealth, such that they had to be more frugal with their expenditures, they would experience diminished self-unification as well, due to adaptation of personal commitments to excess wealth. But I doubt we would say this individual was equally diminished in autonomy even if we accepted they were lacking in self-unification.

An agent who fails to realize the commitment to travel in luxury to faraway destinations is clearly a far cry from an agent who fails to purchase or spend time on personal or recreational goods because they are overworked and under threat of eviction. But why is this so? We must assume that the privileged agent's personal commitments are just as strong and just as binding as that of the agent in poverty. Perhaps, even, the privileged agent feels more strongly about the commitments they feel they are losing out on due to minor financial setbacks *because* they actually have the time to reflect on how much these commitments mean to them. Yet my point is precisely that it seems there is a difference between poverty and modest wealth, and not only because poverty is an obvious example of a situation that render one less able to self-unify. Now Killmister could say that even if the privileged agent experiences diminished self-unification, it is relatively less than the agent in poverty.

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<sup>272</sup> Killmister, p. 147.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, the privileged agent's self-constitution is intact, since their basic needs are still met and they are thereby well placed to take up alternative meaningful commitments, whereas someone who solely aims for survival and bases their objectives around this aim would have diminished self-constitution<sup>274</sup>. Yet if we go this route we are still open to the objection that someone could form all of their commitments around survival *without* being alienated from them.

It would seem, then, that insofar as the agents tend to downward or upward preferences, the external provisions that should be in place to allow for agents to satisfy the different elements of their autonomy are differentiated according to individual commitments. But surely this can't be right – while I acknowledge that Killmister's approach is *prima facie* intuitive as an account of autonomy in some sense<sup>275</sup>, it errs in another important sense. It errs because the focus on internality leaves us with the notion that what agents need from the outside to adequately fulfil their dimensions of self-governance are differentially prescribed according to their actual personal commitments. And *this* seems just as implausible – it looks like we must stop short of casting *any* kind of normative threshold of external conditions as relevant for self-governance. We are committed to saying that, for someone who truly commits to a bare minimum of subsistence, that there is no normative demand to raise *their* expectations; likewise, for someone like the privileged individual whose commitments have been adapted in an upward direction, we must admit that they require excess wealth in order to be fully autonomous. Surely, though, we do not want to claim that it is *purely* a matter of personal constitution what external conditions are required for autonomy.

If we assess the matter with something more akin to Mackenzie's approach, however, we can counter this implication. Consider again the example of the privileged vs. impoverished agent. We can explain the case of the impoverished agent without limiting it to a matter of how self-unified they are. Rather, the very fact that opportunities for decently paid work is inaccessible to the impoverished agent is criticisable because it limits the agent's

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<sup>275</sup> Killmister's approach is an elegant one because there is no need, on her approach, to posit that any particular outside conditions are necessary for autonomy. For example, we can say on her account that something like educational opportunities are necessary for autonomy insofar as such opportunities enable self-governance conditions by helping agents make better informed choices that form part of their commitments. On the other hand, Mackenzie's account seems to suggest there is a kind of 'list', which the provision of educational opportunities may be part of – but on this account we must be committed to saying educational opportunities are necessary for autonomy, and that just doesn't seem to be true.



options and threatens their financial security *by default*. It may also be criticisable insofar as it is implausible that someone could be meaningfully self-governing under such conditions, but this does not seem to be the main issue. Furthermore, in the case of the privileged agent, we can avoid the problem of upward adaptation<sup>276</sup> to which Killmister's account is prone, because we can make a substantive normative statement about the sorts or types of external freedom or opportunity conditions that we might reasonably expect agents to have access to, rather than allowing something like "the option of endless wish-fulfillment"<sup>277</sup> to become a necessary aspect of the agent's autonomy. This will allow us to differentiate between the privileged vs. impoverished agent quite easily without having to argue over the finer points of their self-governance. This yields us the more balanced view that what the agent chooses and what the outside world is like are interdependent, and that both aspects constitute parts of one's autonomy.

The next advantage of Mackenzie's approach is that it is relational enough to avoid conceding that restoration of autonomy under oppression is either implausible or possible only through compliance. As mentioned, Killmister's account is vulnerable to the counterintuitive idea that the problem of oppression can be fixed by suggesting that agents *align* their relevant preferences, commitments, goals, etc. with that demanded by their oppression. This implies both that oppression only damages autonomy when individuals fail to identify with it (someone who is happy to submit to their oppression would remain autonomous) and that autonomy could be recovered if agents engaged in wholesale revision of their identity. Mackenzie's view avoids this concession. Restoring autonomy under oppression cannot only be a matter of changing one's identity to suit it, but rather also to do with calling for better external conditions. Even if it were the case that an agent wholly complied, the option to critique the outside circumstances that befall the agent would be left open, since it isn't *only* how the agent relates to the outside world that matters for their autonomy overall. And although it treats such cases more critically than an account solely focused on self-governance, there's no reason why we cannot also acknowledge radical

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<sup>276</sup> Sonja Lyubomirsky, 'Hedonic Adaptation to Positive and Negative Experiences', in *The Oxford Handbook of Stress, Health, and Coping*, ed. By Susan Folkman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 200-224, p. 209.

<sup>277</sup> *Adaptation and Autonomy: Adaptive Preferences in Enhancing and Ending Life*, ed. by Juha Räikkä, Jukka Varelius (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), p. 121.

individual preference changes are authentic and to that extent recognize that individual decisions have a first-personal perspective that commands a degree of respect.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The structural feature of Mackenzie's three-dimensional analysis of autonomy that I find appealing is the fact that she incorporates 'hybrid' factors. By hybrid factors, I mean that she takes internal and external elements to be relevant to autonomy overall, and this mixed approach is an asset of her account. As the previous section has demonstrated, such an approach was able to address several difficulties that Killmister's account would be hard-pressed to resolve. This is because, despite the comprehensive and detailed nature of Killmister's theory, her view fails to be relational in the relevant ways. Mackenzie's account allowed us to problematize and comment on oppressive circumstances in a manner that moved away from the idea that damage to autonomy and restoration of autonomy is solely the responsibility of the agent. Next, her inclusion of relational dimensions of autonomy enables us to explicitly discuss and comment on possible external provisions that might be relevant for autonomy, making the account one that is able to deal with ethical normative questions about what individuals are owed as autonomous people. Furthermore, we are able to circumvent the issue of acquiescence to oppression or adaptation since we can separate divergent internal and external features.

I held off, however, from considering the finer points of Mackenzie's approach critically. In the next chapter, I will show which parts of Mackenzie's theory I think still needs working out, and offer a multidimensional approach of my own that critically builds on Mackenzie's hybrid theory.

## 4

### A Hybrid Multidimensional Approach to Autonomy

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I compared Suzy Killmister's four-dimensional theory of autonomy and Catriona Mackenzie's three-dimensional theory of autonomy. I demonstrated that Mackenzie's approach had greater appeal due to the incorporation of specifically relational elements, which gave her framework a 'hybrid' character. At the end of the previous chapter, however, I hinted that Mackenzie's approach may be problematic under critical scrutiny. In this chapter, I will specify the issues I find with her approach and suggest ways to enhance her model. Overall, the multidimensional theory of autonomy I offer expands on Mackenzie's approach, but will also contain elements that diverge from her account.

#### 4.2 Self-determination

Mackenzie's self-determination axis, which involves *freedom* and *opportunity* conditions, is a dimension I find intuitively plausible. However, it is a dimension that could be more detailed. I will work through several issues with her approach before adopting a modified version of this dimension.

Mackenzie's claim is that *political* and *personal* liberties are the freedom conditions necessary for self-determination. Political liberty (e.g. freedom of association) and personal liberty (e.g. freedom of sexual expression) are both freedoms *to* do something. She does say personal liberty subsumes a negative type of freedom as well, like freedom *from* coercion, but she is mostly focused on *substantive* ideas about freedom. As for opportunity conditions, she focuses on 'substantive equality of opportunity' for capabilities that contribute to valuable functionings (that is, 'doings' and 'beings', which refer to the actions a person carries out and the states of being that they attain)<sup>278</sup>. This is based on the capabilities approach to well-being, on which functionings part of a capability set are opportunities to the

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<sup>278</sup> Ian Carter, 'Is the Capability Approach Paternalist?', *Economics and Philosophy*, 30 (2014), 75-98 (p. 77).

extent that the individual has the “personal ability, resources, practical means, and knowledge that is required to achieve the combination of functionings in question, *and* that the external circumstances (social, economic and physical environment) are such that he or she could do so”<sup>279</sup>.

#### 4.2.1 Capabilities and the charge of paternalism

While the linkage of opportunity and substantive freedoms with considerations about equality is a strength of this approach, I think the purview of what she considers freedom could be more detailed. Mackenzie buys into the view that a just society should provide “equality of access to a wide range of opportunities but leave it to individuals to choose which particular capabilities to realize beyond the threshold”<sup>280</sup>. So there is a distinction between *having access to* opportunities and actually *exercising* them. The question of positive access to opportunity can help us assess disparities of provisions made available to persons. As Laura Davy points out in her discussion on disability, in assessing individual autonomy we ought to be looking for the *presence* of factors like “advocates who recognize the agent as a valued individual...external resources available to him or her...internal factors such as self-confidence and self-assertion, dignity, and security”<sup>281</sup>. By understanding self-determination, and to that extent autonomy, in this way, responsibility becomes about “...the particular conditions and social relations under which the individual’s autonomy is best able to flourish”<sup>282</sup>.

On the flipside, however, it is ambiguous what the ‘threshold’ level of capabilities actually are: the distinction between *access* and *exercise* may not be so clear-cut. In this case the substantive ideals which Mackenzie endorses face a possible charge of paternalism. Now in the context of the capabilities approach we might first distinguish between realized functionings and capabilities by thinking about functionings like achievements of doings, and capabilities like “valuable options from which one can choose”<sup>283</sup>. For instance, Ingrid Robeyns says “every person should have the opportunity to be part of a community...but if

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<sup>279</sup> Tania Burchardt, ‘Capabilities and disability: the capabilities framework and the social model of disability’, *Disability & Society*, 19 (2004), 735-751 (p. 738).

<sup>280</sup> Mackenzie, p. 30.

<sup>281</sup> Laura Davy, ‘Philosophical Inclusive Design: Intellectual Disability and the Limits of Individual Autonomy in Moral and Political Theory’, *Hypatia*, 30 (2015), 132-148 (p. 144).

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ingrid Robeyns, ‘The Capability Approach: a theoretical survey’, *Journal of Human Development*, 6 (2005), 93-114 (p. 95).

someone prefers to be a hermit...they should also have this option”<sup>284</sup>. Capabilities endow us with the choice to carry out valuable functionings, but it is recapitulated that *access* does not imply *exercise*. Thus, having the *option* to enact capabilities conducive to well-being would be enough to enable someone to be self-determining.

However, as Rutger Claassen points out, it is possible for the ‘capabilities approach’ to become a ‘functionings approach’ in its *promotion* of capabilities<sup>285</sup>. The degree to which the promotion of capabilities become ‘paternalist’ will depend on where the threshold level for each capability is marked, the extensiveness of the list of capabilities, and the extent to which individual responsibility for losses of capacity is tolerated<sup>286</sup>. In the context of my discussion on self-determination as a feature of autonomy, I take Claassen’s point to track a possible collapse of *access* into *exercise*; that is, promotion of capabilities can incline toward a kind of paternalism by generating expectations about the extent to which capabilities should be exercised.

This possibility affects Mackenzie’s account. To the degree that Mackenzie advocates self-determination as a normative desideratum – and not only as a neutral descriptor – of autonomy, she is committed to promote some conception of valuable functioning, and the conceptions of good and flourishing thereby attached. This may not be an issue of paternalism *per se* (where paternalism concerns *interferences* geared toward the agent’s own good or interest<sup>287</sup>); indeed it does not seem correct to claim that simply promoting efforts to compensate inequalities of opportunity count as paternalistic. However, in cases where *access* and *exercise* overlap, it looks like the autonomous status of agents would be affected accordingly. The following case, for instance, seems problematic: the case of an agent who fails to form objectives concurrent with the exercise of certain capabilities due to internalized restraint (that is, “people who seem to acquiesce to their own deprivation”<sup>288</sup>). The intuition that they are diminished in autonomy does not only seem to be rooted in an objection regarding the *access* they have, because it may be that the agent does have access to the

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Rutger Claassen, ‘Capability Paternalism’, *Economics and Philosophy*, 30 (2014), 57-73 (p. 57).

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>287</sup> Christian F. Rostbøll, ‘Preferences and Paternalism: On Freedom and Deliberative Democracy’, *Political Theory*, 33 (2005), 370-396 (p. 383).

<sup>288</sup> Serene Khader, *Adaptive Preferences and Women’s Empowerment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 4.

relevant capabilities. Rather, it seems rooted in the fact that the agent chooses to refrain from exercising certain capabilities related to valuable functioning.

But this is where things get tricky. In the type of case that I am concerned with – where opportunity is technically available but lack uptake due to a reason attributable to a psychological disposition, like an adaptive preference – it is not clear whether internalized restraint should be treated as a failure of access to opportunity or as a failure to exercise opportunity. Treating self-imposed restraint as a failure of access seems restrictive, since it suggests that individual preferences are indelibly “deformed”<sup>289</sup> by oppression. This opens up paternalistic attitudes about individuals in a way that affects appraisal of their autonomous status. Now Ann Levey says feminism might actually warrant this. She says taking feminism seriously requires that we give up the tenet of liberalism that is “bound to respect choices that reflect people’s understanding of their own good”, since this problematically implies respecting choices that “perpetuate differences in power and expectations between men and women”<sup>290</sup>. To place this thought in the context of our discussion, we might say that insofar as internalized self-restraint is unresponsive to self-determining opportunities, we are committed as theorists of autonomy to discount adaptive failures of capability uptake as having autonomous status.

On the other hand, if we treat this phenomenon of ‘adaptive preferences’ as a failure to exercise capabilities, we have no special reason to handle the case any differently to routine cases of individuals who deviate or desist from exercising certain capabilities. According to Martha Nussbaum, women can choose, for instance, to ‘return’ to a traditional domestic life after working outside the home, or to return to veiling from non-veiling<sup>291</sup>. She says this is a matter of their change in “mode of functioning” rather than in their “level of political capability as citizens”<sup>292</sup>. Crucially, however, we seem to get different intuitions in the case of the agent who makes a conscious *return* to a more traditional mode of life after having given opportunity a real chance compared to those who have not endeavoured to do so.

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<sup>289</sup> H. E. Haber, ‘Adaptive Preference’, *Social Theory and Practice*, 33 (2007), 105-126 (p. 105).

<sup>290</sup> Ann Levey, ‘Liberalism, Adaptive Preferences, and Gender Equality’, *Hypatia*, 20 (2005), 127-143 (p. 128).

<sup>291</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, ‘Symposium on Amartya Sen’s philosophy: 5 Adaptive preferences and women’s options’, *Economics and Philosophy*, 17 (2001), 67-88 (p. 86).

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

Mackenzie herself treats the phenomenon of adaptive preferences as worrying. To clarify, Mackenzie views adaptive preferences as a phenomenon “whereby persons who are subject to social domination...adapt their preferences (or goals) to their circumstances, eliminating or failing to form preferences (or goals) that cannot be satisfied...”<sup>293</sup>. This category of preferences are formed under, and “psychologically traceable”<sup>294</sup> to, unjust conditions. This worry seems to suggest that choices made on the basis of adaptive preferences should be appraised as non-autonomous. Now Serene Khader’s view of inappropriately formed adaptive preferences (IAPs) is that their objectionability has to do with the undermining of agents’ flourishing, not that they are necessarily “procedural autonomy deficits”<sup>295</sup>. Be that as it may, I think the terminology of ‘adaptive preference’ is suggestive of the idea that repudiation of opportunities for flourishing exhibit a defect of self-determination, which is misleading.

#### 4.2.2 Negative liberty and non-domination

Let us consider if a more negative idea of liberty might help us think through these concerns. Following Isaiah Berlin’s characterization, negative liberty is about arbitrating “the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others”<sup>296</sup>. Negative liberty necessarily has a social significance – if I am prevented by *others* from doing what I could otherwise do, I am unfree to that extent. Negative liberty as non-interference is, of course, not equivalent to boundless freedom. If it were so, we would encounter a paradox whereby non-interference that is too wide would “entail a state in which all men could boundlessly interfere with all other men”<sup>297</sup>. It is also distinct from claims to the effect that if I am “unable to jump more than ten feet in the air...or can’t understand the darker pages of Hegel”<sup>298</sup>, that I am thereby unfree to that degree. Cases of unfreedom concern things that *others* have obstructed me from doing, rather than incapacities of ‘natural’ causes<sup>299</sup>. Negative liberty, then, seems like the

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<sup>293</sup> Mackenzie Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>294</sup> Michael Cholbi, ‘The Desire For Work As An Adaptive Preference’, *Autonomy*, 4 (2018), 2-17 (p. 4).

<sup>295</sup> Serene Khader, *Adaptive Preferences and Women’s Empowerment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 75.

<sup>296</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Liberty’, *Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. by Henry Hardy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ian Carter, "Positive and Negative Liberty", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>.

conception of freedom that will allow us to straightforwardly block paternalistic attitudes in the ambit of actionable individual preferences. A conception of negative liberty as part of self-determination itself would allow for tolerance and inclusion of failures in uptake of capabilities, since what really counts one as free is that one's personal choices are not interfered with.

As mentioned previously, however, there seems to be a tension between the principles it is desirable to institute from a feminist standpoint, and liberal non-interference. Furthermore, it is ambiguous whether things like impersonal economic constraints (e.g. poverty and unemployment) count as unfreedom or mere incapacity. This is obviously a problem if we care about considerations of justice and self-determination more generally. The mere absence of impediments fail to spell out what compensatory measures persons are owed to actually count as free in the substantive sense – this is what Mackenzie finds problematic with a 'negative' approach to freedom.

So we have, on the one hand, the capabilities approach, which identify meaningful opportunities but appear to import ideals of flourishing in tension with something like adaptive choices. Yet, while the negative liberty view is more permissive of personal choice, it fails to comment on what it is people need to be free in the substantive sense. I think the idea of *republican* freedom will be of help here. The core idea behind republican freedom is that non-interference is “not extensionally equivalent to non-domination”<sup>300</sup>, and that non-domination is in fact a more important kind of freedom. For Philip Pettit, it is not enough that people are not “actively coerced or obstructed”<sup>301</sup>, since one can still be unfree if they are “subject to arbitrary sway”<sup>302</sup>. Now someone has dominating power over another to the extent that:

1. They have the capacity to interfere
2. On an arbitrary basis
3. In certain choices that the other is in a position to make<sup>303</sup>.

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<sup>300</sup> Thomas W. Simpson, 'The Impossibility of Republican Freedom', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 45 (2017), 27-53 (p. 28).

<sup>301</sup> Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 52.



Thus, domination is distinct from interference in that it counts the mere *capacity* of arbitrary interference as a kind of unfreedom, even if an agent is not currently subject to interference<sup>304</sup>. But unlike the liberal notion of negative liberty, not all interference entails unfreedom. A legal constraint that protects worker's rights, for instance, interferes with the negative liberty of employers, but prevents workers from arbitrary dismissal<sup>305</sup>. If the regulation prevents citizens from being dominated, the 'interference' is non-arbitrary and as such does not constitute a loss of liberty<sup>306</sup>. Pettit's theory is thus in principle compatible with paternalistic interference to the extent that "interference that furthers the ideas and interests of those affected is acceptable"<sup>307</sup> under the specific ideal of non-domination. This freedom requires emancipation – it requires that one be able to "stand eye to eye with your fellow citizens"<sup>308</sup>. Freedom as non-domination, I think, can explain the wrongness of adaptive preferences without it being a matter of paternalism about subjective *well-being*. The problem isn't that there is something wrong with individuals forming preferences contrary to opportunities for well-being or flourishing *per se*, but rather that such choices sometimes happen to replicate and reinforce existing structures contrary to the ideal of freedom as non-domination, which in relation to autonomy is a legitimate concern.

Freedom as non-domination can also be a lens by which to understand our every-day characterizations of personal autonomy, and it is one that is attentive to feminist interests as well. It states quite explicitly that unfreedom is often grounded in differential relational power, and captures the idea that the autonomous agent is someone who is "hard to push around, that has a mind of her own, and that is difficult to use or to bend to one's will"<sup>309</sup>. Michael Garnett's account of autonomy, for instance, without committing to substantive political claims made on the basis of republicanism, acknowledges that the idea of autonomy

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<sup>304</sup> Michael David Harbour, 'Non-domination and pure negative liberty', *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics*, 11 (2011), 185-205 (p. 188).

<sup>305</sup> Cillian McBride, 'Freedom as non-domination: radicalisation or retreat?', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 18 (2015), 349-374 (p. 355).

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>307</sup> Carla Saenz, 'Republicanism: An Unattractive Version of Liberalism', *Ethics*, 7 (2008), 267-285

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>309</sup> Michael Garnett, 'The Autonomous Life: A Pure Social View', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 92(2014), 143-158 (p. 144).

as “a matter of counterfactually robust independence from the control of others”<sup>310</sup> is a republican idea.

Is there a way we can relate capabilities and non-domination? Pettit himself points out that the republican view of freedom and the capabilities approach associated with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum share the emphasis “on the connection between freedom and non-dependency”<sup>311</sup>. He says that functioning capabilities, not merely functioning prospects, are important: it is not enough, for instance, that “the wife is likely to be treated well by her powerful husband, the employee by his or her powerful employer, the poor of the village by the powerful landlord”<sup>312</sup>. Persons must “enjoy that treatment on a basis that is independent of the goodwill of the powerful”<sup>313</sup>. In this way, capabilities are essential to eradicate domination, not just destitution<sup>314</sup>.

It is not yet clear, however, that bringing non-domination into the picture alleviates the issues I’ve said attach to the capabilities approach. After all, my worry with Mackenzie’s adopting of capabilities was that it would end up importing paternalistic attitudes about certain kinds of choice, especially over deficits in well-being or flourishing due to choices based on adaptive preferences. With respect to republican freedom, Pettit says “neither adaptation nor ingratiation counts as a possible means of liberation”<sup>315</sup>. He continues that we ought to align ourselves to thought that states, “if the options in a choice are open only by virtue of the goodwill of the powerful, then the agent is not free in making that choice”<sup>316</sup>. Republicanism suggests that people are only free if they can actually resist arbitrary power. Still, even if we take for granted that we have the correct notions of what is and is not arbitrary, republican freedom seems even *more* stringent than the capabilities approach. Subsumed as a way to think about self-determination, it looks like soft forms of resistance (e.g. ‘symbolic contestations of male power’<sup>317</sup> through song or dance) which do not actually

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>311</sup> Philip Pettit, ‘Symposium on Amartya Sen’s Philosophy: 1 Capability and Freedom: A Defence of Sen’, *Economics and Philosophy*, 17 (2001), 1-20 (p. 18).

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>315</sup> Philip Pettit, ‘The Instability of Freedom as Noninterference: The Case of Isaiah Berlin’, *Ethics*, 121 (2011), 693-716 (p. 705).

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 708.

<sup>317</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘Gender, Power, and Contestation: Rethinking bargaining with patriarchy’, in *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender, Analysis, and Policy*, ed. By Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (New York: Routledge, 1998) pp. 135-152, p. 141.

offset or topple arbitrary power would not seriously be appraised as contributing to the agent's autonomy in any way. This may be attended by the suggestion that people fail to be autonomous unless they are fully equipped to resist domination. Yet, scholars like Uma Narayan point out that practices which look to be adaptive should instead be seen as a kind of “bargaining” with the patriarchy<sup>318</sup> rather than being prisoner to the patriarchy. Her view is that choice is possible even under the constraint of patriarchy<sup>319</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Republicanism and self-determination

Perhaps there is a way to account for the stringency of republican freedom. In her discussion of the hijab controversy in France, Cécile Laborde says that the kind of republican paternalism embodied in the vote to ban headscarves in French state schools back in 2004 was “wrong in principle and counterproductive”<sup>320</sup>, because it did not “...respect the agency of those women it claims to emancipate in the name of an elitist, decontextualized and imperialist conception of individual autonomy”<sup>321</sup>. Laborde points out that even if it is true that Muslim women face legitimate struggles, it is unhelpful to further coerce and stigmatize them.

Now Laborde's idea of *critical republicanism*, I think, will give us an appealing framework of freedom as related to self-determination. Laborde says that her project of critical republican non-domination, which builds on Pettit's theory, is aligned with “the broad social aims of feminist and anti-racist movements”<sup>322</sup>. What this framework requires is the “removal of obstacles to the full participation of members of minorities as citizens. These obstacles are mostly socio-economic (in the form of substantive opportunities) and symbolic and discursive (in the form of dominating social norms and ethnocentric soft rules)”<sup>323</sup>. She believes minorities are better served by non-domination than by “the de-contextualized

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<sup>318</sup> Uma Narayan, ‘Minds of Their Own: Choices, Autonomy, Cultural Practices, and Other Women’, in *A Mind Of One's Own: Feminist Essays On Reason And Objectivity*, ed. By Louise Antony, (New York: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>319</sup> Anita Superson, "Feminist Moral Psychology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/feminism-moralpsych/>.

<sup>320</sup> Cécile Laborde, *Critical Republicanism: The Hijab Controversy and Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 147.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p. 18-19.

application of negative principles of difference-blind equality”<sup>324</sup>. Her view espouses not only “just distribution of goods and resources”<sup>325</sup>, but also “the expansion of basic powers, virtues, and capabilities, including those of personal autonomy, civic skills, and self-respect”<sup>326</sup>. This makes her view very much in line with Mackenzie’s ideas.

Compared to Mackenzie, Laborde distances herself from talk of promoting the ‘good life’ or the ‘autonomous life’. Rather, she believes autonomy-enhancing education is a way to help individuals resist domination “within the cultural and normative frameworks they recognize as their own”<sup>327</sup>. Unlike republicans, who emphasize the right to ‘exit’, *critical* republicanism emphasizes the right to ‘voice’. Thus, voting to ban religious headscarves in schools is not the right kind of move: teaching autonomy-related skills is. It is not about imposing a “comprehensive vision of the good life as a life of autonomy”<sup>328</sup>, but rather granting agents skills by which to “detect, and contest, the ways in which their legitimate ties and commitments can be distorted by illegitimate and oppressive uses of power over them”<sup>329</sup>. This, Laborde claims, can counter the “perfectionist pitfalls”<sup>330</sup> of some forms of secularist republicanism without taking a wholly non-interventionist stand.

With the concept of non-domination, and especially critical republicanism as a qualified kind of ‘educational paternalism’ promoting autonomy-related skills, we are able to ward off some of the more worrying kinds of paternalism attached to the ideas discussed thus far, such as paternalism about the good and flourishing related to capabilities, or the paternalism attached to the idea of necessary resistance of, or exit from, arbitrary power for republican freedom.

#### **4.2.4 Immoral action**

Some self-determining actions seem to fall outside the realm of ‘valuable functioning’ and ‘equality of opportunity’ not merely by *omission* or *adaptation* but through immoral conduct. This is the subject of my concern for this section. It is decidedly anti-republican to

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

carry out immoral dominating behaviours toward others. So we need to explain now how individuals who deviate in this way fit into the picture of autonomy.

Mackenzie herself is careful to avoid the idea of ‘freedom as license’ and suggested that this is *not* the view of self-determination by which to think through autonomy. As far as *valuing* autonomy goes, I think she is correct that immoral action would pose a problem, since we would want to stop short of *advocating* individual immorality. But I believe this conflates exercises of autonomy with a narrow sphere of *valuable* exercises of autonomy, which seems to me a mistake. Excluding immoral action from self-determination would be untenable, both because it is implausible to treat ordinary agents as only capable of morally righteous self-determination, and because doing so would equivocate immorality with non-autonomy. It looks like Mackenzie’s adoption of the capabilities approach is open to this equivocation since she talks exclusively about *valuable* self-determination. But she needs to also provide a clear account of the possibility of immoral, or even non-ideal, but nonetheless *self-determining* choices.

It needs to be clear that even if self-determination as the uptake of valuable opportunities is the framework we want to *promote* in a just society, we need to acknowledge that exercises which fall short of this ideal may still be compatible with self-determination. The ideas we’ve explored in the sections above suggest, broadly, that freedom concerns *being* free of external arbitrary hold. This seems to me consistent with individually rationalizing and realizing odious ends. Individuals might adopt immoral or problematic ends – not as a result of domination – as choices that have practical import for them, and as such immoral action should count among the individual’s free choices. The difference is that even if such choices count as free they may not be allowed or permitted for other, stronger reasons (Ben Saunders’ reading of Mill’s Harm Principle, for instance, is that interfering with someone’s liberty to prevent non-consensual harm is justified<sup>331</sup>).

Immoral action is not necessarily incompatible with self-determination, but may well be in tension with imperatives of non-domination. We may treat immoral actions as abuses of self-determination and autonomy to that extent because they are autonomous actions *at the expense of* others. We can accept that they are autonomous actions without approving of or

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<sup>331</sup> Ben Saunders, ‘Reformulating Mill’s Harm Principle’, *Mind*, 125 (2016), 1005-1032 (p. 1015).

valuing those actions. This appraisal is not something Mackenzie accounted for in her advocacy of political and personal liberties, so I believe my comments here will strengthen the claims being made for the self-determination axis.

Overall, then, my characterization of the dimension of self-determination is this: for an agent to satisfy the axis of self-determination, they must be accorded certain basic freedoms and opportunities that equip them with skills that enable one to combat domination within the normative contours of one's own environment. That is, persons are entitled to make use of their freedoms and opportunities to offset domination in a context-sensitive fashion. Agents, on the whole, have a claim to self-determination in terms of freedom and opportunities that relate to ways of resisting domination. However, opportunities do not require actual uptake, although there can be differences in autonomous status depending on the type of failure of uptake. In cases of uptake failures related to adaptive preferences, we ought to stop short of remonstrating or further restraining the agent; at the same time, we should acknowledge that there is a tension between the ideal of non-domination and the replication of domination which might justify the kinds of autonomy-training imperatives attached to Laborde's critical republicanism. In the case of immoral action, it is important that we disvalue heinous actions, but to the extent that one can form immoral ends of practical personal import without being dominated, they are still compatible with self-determination. As such, we ought to stop short of counting immoral actions as less autonomous.

### **4.3 Self-governance**

The next dimension I adopt from Mackenzie's account is that of *self-governance*. Self-governance, for Mackenzie, involves authenticity and competence conditions. Mackenzie accepts John Christman's historical account of autonomy for the aspect of authenticity, and several items of Nussbaum's capabilities approach for her competence conditions. However, I prefer to cast self-governance in a different way. My view is that we should adopt a flexible approach to authenticity conditions, rather than commit to any one theory. As for competence conditions, I think Diana Tietjens Meyers' view of autonomy competencies better spell out the kinds of skills relevant for self-governance, rather than Nussbaum's capabilities approach.

#### **4.3.1 Authenticity**

The concept of authenticity can be used as grounding for autonomy. Authenticity holds attraction as an element of autonomy because it promises to reveal one's 'true' or 'deep' self.

Many philosophers have made just this move: they treat autonomy as “attributed to persons largely in virtue of the authenticity of the person’s cognitive and psychological states, character, and choices”<sup>332</sup>. Accounting for deficits of this sense of autonomy looks less at “external forces such as coercion” and more so regard internal forces that “usurp power from a person”<sup>333</sup> from within. Alleged examples of such threats include addictions or strong phobias<sup>334</sup>. These are phenomena whose presence in a person we often evaluate as a loss of the individual’s authentic self – that is, a loss of *who they are*.

Other scholars, like Susan Wolf, are doubtful of the existence of an “ultrareal or superdeep self...arising from nothing”<sup>335</sup>. But authenticity and autonomy can come apart in other ways. For Marina Oshana, for instance, an agent can be autonomous even if she is “alienated from aspects of her character or her history that bear on how she conceives of herself”<sup>336</sup>. This is because Oshana sees autonomy as being about having a “standing that accords her the power to make choices expressive of her will”<sup>337</sup>, which requires practical control rather than authenticity.

For Michael Garnett, analysing the ‘authentic’ self may not be the best way to understand autonomy as self-rule<sup>338</sup>. On his social view of self-rule, a person is self-ruled “just in case she is not ruled from without”<sup>339</sup>. This can be interpreted as the absence of “rule by others”<sup>340</sup>, rather than taking a substantive view of the authentic self. The benefit of taking authenticity and autonomy apart in such a way is that it allows us to acknowledge “a person subject to ongoing coercion, such as a slave, as lacking in self-rule, without thereby having to regard him as also suffering from any kind of internal fracturing of his will”<sup>341</sup>. Views of

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<sup>332</sup> Marina Oshana, ‘Autonomy and the question of authenticity’, *Social Theory and Practice*, 33 (2007), 411-429 (p. 414).

<sup>333</sup> Robert Noggle, ‘Autonomy and the Paradox of Self-Creation: Infinite Regresses, Finite Selves, and the Limits of Authenticity’ in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. By James Stacey Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 87-108, p. 87.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Susan Wolf, ‘Freedom within Reason’, in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. By James Stacey Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 258-276, p. 269.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., p. 429.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

<sup>338</sup> Michael Garnett, ‘Taking the Self out of Self-Rule’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 16 (2013), 21-33 (p. 32).

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

autonomy more concerned with the elements of self-determination like freedom as non-domination, then, seem to be in direct tension with the idea of autonomy as ‘authenticity’ in the deep sense. I share this view to an extent – clearly an agent can be authentic but fail to be autonomous in senses discussed. But if authenticity can be in tension with autonomy as self-determination, does it make sense to include the idea of authenticity in this analysis of autonomy?

I think authenticity conditions are still a useful way to glean individual rationales or objectives, which I do think is worth counting as part of the picture of autonomy. It seems that even if we are sceptical about the prospect of anyone being in touch with their authentic selves, it should still be reasonable to accept that individuals, barring extreme hindrances, have at least *partial* access to who they are. That is to say, even a confused or disingenuous person has *some* functional idea about who they are. So my view is that we should remain flexible with respect to authenticity, not endorsing any one approach but treating different accounts based on authenticity as targeting different focal points of *who one is*.

#### **4.3.1.1 Issues with authenticity conditions**

To show why adopting any one approach to authenticity would be problematic, I borrow from Paul Benson’s insights. Benson surveys four varieties of identity-based theories that he takes to be a family of related accounts as subject to several issues. I take such theories to fall under ‘authenticity’ in Mackenzie’s terminology, so these terms may be used interchangeably. He says identity-based accounts fail to supply sufficient conditions for autonomy. He describes how each of the account tries to locate agential ownership. The first type of identity-based theory is the *identification* account. The Frankfurtian hierarchical account can be taken to be an instance of identification. Next, there is *evaluative self-disclosure*, according to which, following Gary Watson, agents truly own their actions when “those actions arise from their systematic evaluative commitments”<sup>342</sup>. That is, actions that flow from one’s values and ends exhibit what the agent is really about. Then we have the *whole-self* theory of ownership propounded by scholars like Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder, on which agents’ actions can be classified as their own when those acts are “produced by beliefs and desires that are well integrated within agents’ whole

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<sup>342</sup> Paul Benson, ‘Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in autonomous Agency’, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 101-126, p. 103.



personalities”<sup>343</sup>. Lastly, *reflective non-alienation* accounts, developed by proponents like John Christman, claim that persons truly own their actions when they act on motives “whose processes of development they would not resist, upon reflection, where such reflection would satisfy certain constraints of competence...”<sup>344</sup>. This means agents take ownership of their choices just in case they do not or would not disown them after attending to their historical development.

Excepting the more historical views, these accounts are subject to the problem of oppression. Benson also believes there is another issue that poses a problem for *all* of the identity-based accounts mentioned. This is the issue of trivial action. Trivial action challenges the purported connection presumed “between what agents really care about and which actions they genuinely own.”<sup>345</sup> It is unclear how identity-based accounts explain routine or unconscious decisions as compatible with autonomy. Benson thus calls for a revision of how we think about autonomy that steers away from the identity-based framework.

He believes agential ownership rather consists in a kind of *normative authority*. The type of authorization that constitutes autonomy must be “an authorization of *agents* with respect to their wills...”<sup>346</sup> Autonomy, he claims, is about the authority that agents *claim* in taking ownership of their decisions. He believes such an account will fare much better in being able to detect why “pervasive social conditioning of an Orwellian sort interferes with autonomy”<sup>347</sup>. Such states negatively affect autonomy because they alter the agent’s “proper authorization as owners of their intentions.”<sup>348</sup> I believe Benson is on the right track in stipulating that we need to explore elements that can explain the autonomy of *persons*, rather than taking on difficult task of unmasking the true self behind every choice via identity-based models. Benson’s point is that what speaks for the agent has to do with how the person regards themselves – it must be that they regard themselves as being in an “appropriate position to speak for her decisions...irrespective of whether her actions actually issue from her deepest or reflectively acceptable motives of values”<sup>349</sup>. Thus, normative authority also

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 104

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>349</sup> Paul Benson, ‘Feminist Second Thoughts about Free Agency’, *Hypatia*, 5 (1990), 47-64 (p. 56).

accounts for trivial action, since we can carry out trivial tasks with authority if not authenticity. And this agential authority does not require that they are able to sift through influences like harmful social norms but rather that they view themselves as answerable for their conduct<sup>350</sup>.

Now I am not willing to reject identity-based models (or to use Mackenzie's terminology: authenticity) completely, as Benson suggests we do. As I've mentioned, I believe authenticity conditions do offer limited, if incomplete, insights about self-governance. It gives us a ground for inquiry into autonomy, though I think Benson does successfully show that they are generally subject to objection. But I am not in complete agreement with Mackenzie, either; I am not convinced that Christman's model is particularly satisfactory. One reason to favour Christman's view is that it focuses more on the process of desire formation<sup>351</sup>, rather than identification with desires. It seems better placed than Frankfurt's hierarchical account, for instance, to capture non-autonomy in a case where someone joins a cult and obsequiously follows its precepts. What we need to ask here concerns what makes this case 'manipulative' compared with any other individual who chooses to shed certain traits and reinvent themselves. That is, what matters is "what the agent thinks about the process of coming to have the desires, and whether she resists that process when (or if) given the chance"<sup>352</sup>, on the condition that one be minimally rational and not self-deceived when engaged in this reflection. Notwithstanding the agent's identification with their desires, what is really at stake is whether they would accept or repudiate the process of the desire formation when reflecting on the process.

Despite the attractiveness of Christman's account, it is still open to a few issues. For example, not everyone may resist problematic developments of desire formation when they attend to them, even if they are minimally rational and not self-deceived. Perhaps one is a victim of a particularly longstanding process of indoctrination, such that having the clear-minded means to repudiate the development of their desires makes no difference in how they actually *value* the preferences they have. It may also be too inclusive of desires whose formation is resisted – and thereby deemed non-autonomous – because of personal guilt, regret, shame, and so on. It doesn't seem quite satisfying, for instance, to say that someone

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>351</sup> John Christman, 'Autonomy and Personal History', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 21 (1991), 1-24 (p. 2).

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

who holds sexist attitudes but recognizes that it was learned from a sexist upbringing and repudiates their formation should be treated as less autonomous with respect to them. Like other authenticity based accounts, Christman's model come with their own set of counterexamples which limit the authoritativeness of the model as the measure of authenticity.

I believe the appropriate move regarding the question of authenticity would actually be to keep a flexible approach. All authenticity models can be treated on their own merits and applicability, but we ought to refrain from making any claim as to which one is *most* authoritative. This move has the advantage of allowing us to suspend our beliefs about what the 'true self' consists in – that is, we do not need to claim that for each action or decision there is a *truest* self that we can locate with any particular procedure. This seems practical and only minimally burdensome. For instance, we might adopt a hierarchical approach as a starting ground of inquiry into personal autonomy in cases where we can rule out manipulation, but may switch to something like Christman's historical account in cases where taking a closer look at the process of desire formation will be relevant. Of course, the reason why my account allows for this latitude in regards to authenticity is because my account is a multidimensional one, and as such an approximation of authenticity would suffice. And although I have acknowledged that authenticity can clash with another aspect of autonomy – that is, the aspect of being free in the self-determined sense – I believe authenticity is still an indispensable aspect in any analysis of autonomy because it tells us, with limited success, who the agent is with respect to their *psychological* perspective.

#### **4.3.2 Competence**

The idea of 'competence' is rather reminiscent of capabilities mentioned in the earlier sections about self-determination. But competences in the context of self-governance denotes skills that can be both more specific or more general than capabilities, and less attached to considerations of goods or just provisions. For Mackenzie, competence is required for self-governance. Mackenzie chooses various items from Nussbaum's list of capabilities as mapping onto skills relevant for self-governance, such as sense, imagination and thought, emotion, practical reason, and affiliation. However, because Mackenzie does not say much more about how exactly these capabilities are connected to self-governance, we encounter a problem straightaway: *why* should the capabilities mentioned be especially relevant for self-governance? Take imagination and thought, for instance: while it seems the actual exercise of

autonomy takes imagination and thought on a basic level, imagination and thought in general does not necessarily lead to autonomy. Skills in *general* – as Bernard Berofsky points out – which are taken to enhance individual powers, “do not automatically confer greater self-direction in his life”<sup>353</sup>. For example, intelligence may be necessary to make my autonomous capacity effective. Yet if I use it to “discern better the wishes of my master, my autonomy is hardly enhanced”<sup>354</sup>. It seems quite obvious that being autonomous takes skills and competencies, but it is far from clear what those skills and competencies are. As Mark Piper points out, competency conditions “do not seem necessary for any given case of autonomous willing”<sup>355</sup>. They are perhaps best thought of as “necessary causal enabling conditions” rather than as “necessary ontological constituents”<sup>356</sup> of autonomy. But is this right? We will need to explore the ways we think any given competence or skill is crucially related to autonomy.

It looks like we may now have to fall back on authenticity conditions to *anchor* competence to autonomy. This may well be what Mackenzie meant to do with the competence conditions. We could say something like this: imagination and thought exercised *in accordance with* some authenticity condition (e.g. Frankfurtian hierarchicalism) counts as a type of autonomy competence, but skills and autonomy can come apart when this link is not established. This would enable us to think of skills or competences that have a strong interrelation with self-governance without having to come up with a universal list or *limit* the set of skills that count as autonomy-conducive. This would account for the fact that, for instance, the academic philosopher and the professional athlete could be exercising very different skills in their day-to-day life to attain autonomy. It looks like critical reflective skills allow the academic philosopher to be autonomous inasmuch as such skills help them carry out their longstanding, self-governing goal to philosophize, whereas the same skill for a professional athlete may work against her to the extent that her success hinges on her being able to enter a kind of state of flow<sup>357</sup>, which does not involve the kind of self-conscious deliberation expected of a self-governed philosopher.

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<sup>353</sup> Bernard Berofsky, *Liberation from Self: A theory of personal autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Mark Piper, ‘Autonomy and the Normativity Question: Framing Considerations’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 21 (2013), 204-224 (p. 219).

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>357</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as an optimal experience – situations ‘in which attention can be freely invested to achieve a person’s goals, because there is no disorder to straighten out, no

We might say that what the academic philosopher and the professional athlete have in common is that whatever competences they are putting to use for their various pursuits satisfy the relevant authenticity condition. As such, the idea of competence accommodates a diverse range of personal skills as applicable to self-governance. However, as I already observed in the previous section, ‘authenticity’ conditions are not invulnerable; we can be dubious about it implying that a ‘true self’ which speaks for the individual is discoverable in every action. So the ‘anchoring’ method of competence to authenticity may not be useful after all. Say, for example, that I exercise the skill of practical reason in accordance with a relevant authenticity condition, like critical reflection. However, the condition that one be self-reflected fails to be sensitive to oppression or indoctrination. How do we then rule out the blind-spot? It looks like what I *believe* is an authentic exercise of practical reason may not in fact be so. And if it is not in fact so, the skill or competence exercised would not bear any overlap or relation with my self-governance and autonomy – I would simply be exercising a kind of power in general.

#### 4.3.2.1 Competency as meaningful activity

So it looks like the ‘competence’ side of self-governance is equally as elusive as the authenticity conditions. How exactly, then, is the dimension of self-governance achievable at all? We can, I think, anchor competence to autonomy in a different way. I’ll cite Diana Meyers’ autonomy competence view to make my point. According to Meyers, distinguishing between autonomous and non-autonomous individuals depends on “the capabilities people have at their disposal and the way in which people go about fashioning their lives... they possess and exercise skills that maintain a fluid interaction between their traits, feelings, beliefs, values, their extended plans, their current possibilities for realizing these plans, and their conduct.”<sup>358</sup> Her view is a ‘relational’ one; autonomy is socially gained, through “acquired practical competencies in self-discovery, self-definition, self-knowledge, and self-direction”<sup>359</sup>. She says that ‘skilful exercise’ of autonomy competency enables individuals to “arrange their lives so as to give fuller expression to accepted qualities”<sup>360</sup>. Meyers believes people must be able to envisage life plans, which require memory, imagination, and is

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threat for the self to defend against’. See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness* (London: Rider, 1992) p. 39.

<sup>358</sup> Diana T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 55.

<sup>359</sup> Kim Atkins, ‘Autonomy and autonomy competencies: a practical and relational approach’, *Nursing Philosophy*, 7 (2006), 205-215 (p. 209).

<sup>360</sup> Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, p. 56.

normally enhanced in dialogue with others<sup>361</sup>. Self-referential qualities make it clearer why things like memory and imagination could be thought of as autonomy-conducive. She also says that while few of us plan out our entire lives, the autonomy competency view requires that we have at least some conception of the kind of life we want to lead and the qualities we want to have. We become more autonomous as we acquire the desired talents, interests, and relationships part of that plan<sup>362</sup>. In a way, Meyers' view might be seen as similar to Killmister's dimension of self-constitution, on which an agent must have a 'non-empty' set of self-defining attitudes and be in *the business of* taking on commitments for oneself. But I think Meyers' view will suffice to overcome the difficulty we face in connecting the idea of competence with authenticity and autonomy.

What we have with Meyers' account, I think, is a picture of how different skills may be variously coordinated to give way to complex activity and imbue one's life with a 'full' expression. So I wonder if we could not say something like this: the competences necessary for self-governance are just those skills that the agent uses to develop or enhance subjectively meaningful personal activity. This will take care of the question of how we discern *what* skills are relevant to autonomy, since any number or specification of skills could be coordinated to effectuate meaningful activity for the individual agent. That is, the skills it takes for a pastry chef to be autonomous will be very different to the skills it takes for an improv comedian to be autonomous, but whatever skills are relevant to their engaging with subjectively meaningful activities will indeed be necessary for their autonomy.

Of course, we can question the number of things we do and be that really count as 'meaningful'. We should perhaps allow that meaningfulness here is relevant to the first-personal perspective rather than something constituted with an objective type of profundity. This is certainly compatible with relationality – what the agent takes to be personally meaningful need not be something they came up with on their own. We can think of meaningfulness as a thick concept – something akin to living up to our own potential, to engage in endeavours we find purposeful and fulfilling from a first-personal perspective, and so on. Meaningful endeavours can be self-governed in the sense of authenticity as well, but what I take to be distinctive about it is that it is more about activity and engagement. We

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Atkins, 'Autonomy and autonomy competencies: a practical and relational approach', p. 207.

might think of Aristotle's ideal of virtue here: he thought that a human life is one of "activity", rather than just "being"<sup>363</sup>.

This view, to an extent, takes care of the issue of collapsing back into authenticity conditions. As I mentioned, anchoring competence to authenticity would not be a fail-safe method since no authenticity condition is *infinitely* sensitive to unforeseen circumstances (e.g. indoctrination, manipulation, etc.). Thus, in the case where I exercise some skill *believing* it to be in service of some autonomously chosen goal that satisfies authenticity, but in fact does not, we can instead ask whether the competencies I am engaged in satisfies first-personal meaningfulness. Now this far from a perfect solution, as competencies exercised in service of what turn out to be a hypnotist's goals, somehow unbeknownst to myself, would not appear any more like autonomy-conducive competencies just because I happen to find personal meaning in carrying out these goals. But steering the question away from authenticity and towards something like the meaningfulness I talked about here seems to alleviate the worry somewhat. It looks like in spite of imperfect authenticity, I can in fact author my activities in a significant way – just in virtue of imbuing personal meaning into what I do and engage in. That is, it seems to *matter less* if the skills I am exercising turn out to service some unknown person or entity if we construe the relationship between our competencies and autonomy in terms of first-personal meaningfulness, or even purposiveness, rather than authenticity. It seems that once we accept this the question of *who* is in control becomes less pertinent.

#### 4.3.2.2 Competency as anticipating autonomy

Yet one might object that meaningfulness fails to be distinctive. Isn't meaningfulness just another way to posit some authenticity condition? In the case of meaning and purpose, I think, we are able to shed the more problematic implications of 'authenticity'. I can be fairly alienated from the identity I embody and the activities I partake and still be able to have a meaningful life. I can repudiate my past decisions or historical events that led to my living the life I am now, and still find meaning in it. For instance, I could have been pressured into taking a job I didn't really want but still be able to exact a purpose in doing it. I could regret growing up in a cult without treating everything I have learned and done within it as tainted

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<sup>363</sup> Daniel C. Russell, 'Phronesis and the Virtues', in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. By Ronald Polansky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 203-220, p. 211.

actions. So I hope it is clear that meaningfulness is distinct from authenticity conditions – taking meaning or finding purpose in some value or activity is not restricted to a specific structure, but could rather be taken up in many different ways.

Still, it seems like now I am suggesting that competencies are autonomy-conducive inasmuch as they give meaning to the agent. What about non-meaningful endeavours that are nevertheless autonomous? What about cases where I am using my skills in a more instrumental fashion, like filing my tax returns, and so on? It certainly seems like I service my autonomy by keeping my life in relative order, but a large part of doing so will involve exercising skills to carry out tasks I find mundane. This seems to be an issue both for authenticity and meaningfulness – on the one hand, it is not clear that exercise of mundane tasks are authentic in the relevant sense, since I may repudiate having to carry out these tasks. And such actions in themselves do not make my life meaningful. One response is to say that mundane and trivial action are so commonplace that the question of authenticity or meaning need not come up in the first place. That is, we allow for a certain degree of latitude for the amount of non-authentic and non-meaningful endeavours we undertake in life to count as autonomous activity both because they form part of, or help develop, an autonomous life overall, and because such undertakings are non-disruptive (that is, they have little effect on the make-up of the person). The distinction that Mackenzie makes between local, programmatic, and global autonomy will be enough to make this point.

But perhaps we have also touched another consideration here: it looks like while competences only look autonomy-conducive when they service some basis of self-governance, they are relevant for autonomy in a wider sense as well. Competencies are necessary for autonomy insofar as they facilitate, maintain, and nurture the *upkeep* of the autonomous person in piecemeal fashion. We do not typically characterize autonomous persons as those who have just come into their autonomy through some drastic and thoroughgoing change, as though by epiphany or divine inspiration. Much of how we come to be are not due to deliberate and carefully calculated events, but rather by accidents, habits, and so on, which often are not strongly connected to the ‘true’ self at all. Thus, the very exercise of skills and competencies in general may be important because of the role they play in *anticipating* and *potentiating* the autonomous person. Even as we recognize that competencies are difficult to link to self-governance and autonomy in an explicit, direct



sense, it seems plausible to posit that their role for autonomy – limitations not withstanding – is integral as part of a person's expressed self.

It may be helpful to split competencies into a tripartite classification – potential competency, dispositional competency, and executive competency. This helps us taxonomize the efficacy of our exercise of various competencies and their relation to autonomy. General skills may fall under *potential* competency in that they are not necessarily always applied toward self-governing deliberation or a particular self-governing purpose but would be necessary for self-governance should the occasion call for it. *Dispositional* competency is the tendency to exercise skills as related to self-governance without necessarily successfully servicing self-governance. For instance, I might use my limited conversational French in attempt to service my self-governing objective to communicate well with fluent French speakers. If I fail, my limited skill does not actually service my objective, but it seems wrong to say that my limited conversational French is not in any way relevant to my self-governing goals. It seems that I had the appropriate disposition to apply the right sort of skill, but that my skill fell short of enabling my autonomous goal to be carried out. Had I advanced to greater fluency, I would be able to communicate well with native speakers, and the skill I applied could then be directly essential toward the servicing of this particular objective. In this case, my French skills would be properly functioning as an *executive* competency, that is, as a type of competency necessary and efficacious for my autonomy.

To summarize, though I have adopted both Mackenzie's authenticity and competence conditions for self-governance as relevant dimensions of autonomy, I took a neutral stance on authenticity conditions by remaining flexible with respect to the kinds of conditions I find most authoritative. Because we suspend affiliation with any particular account of authenticity, we can adopt features of varying authenticity accounts that we find has import depending on the facts of our case. I also provided a comprehensive explanation of how competencies are relevant to autonomy. I addressed the question of how competency is related to self-governance by shifting the focus from the idea of competencies as authenticity-servicing skills, to competencies as activities of first-personal meaningfulness. I then conceived of competencies as having a kind of indirect *precursory* function for self-governance. To distinguish what relationship a particular competency might have to self-governance and autonomy, I graded categories of competencies by distinguishing between *potential*, *dispositional*, and *executive* competencies.

## 4.4 Self-authorization

Moving on, *self-authorization* for Mackenzie is about normative authority. Self-authorization involves three aspects: first, one must be disposed to hold oneself accountable to oneself and to others. Second, one must stand in a certain relation to oneself: they must possess certain self-evaluative attitudes like self-respect. Finally, an agent is self-authorized when they are granted ‘social recognition’ – that is, when others bestow on them the status of an autonomous chooser. I think Mackenzie is right to marry the aspect of accountability with self-regarding attitudes, and that there is a special relationship between them. In this section I will add to Mackenzie’s insights by going into greater detail about self-respect especially – I leave out the aspect of social recognition for now because I believe it warrants its own category as a dimension of autonomy (see section 4.5).

### 4.4.1 Accountability

As far as accountability goes, Mackenzie adopts Andrea Westlund’s dialogical account<sup>364</sup> of self-responsibility. What it means to hold oneself accountable on the dialogical view is that one must have the disposition to hold oneself answerable to (real or imagined) others, and for one to be able to take stock of their own conduct. It does not mean we must literally hold ourselves accountable for everything we do or that we are obliged to take up every critical comment thrown our way; rather, it is about being ready to take responsibility for one’s actions when it is appropriately called for. I think Mackenzie is right in saying that this sort of accountability is closely tied to self-regarding attitudes – she says that accountability requires the agent to stand in certain self-regarding relations.

Take Paul Benson’s view. Benson takes normative authority – which is the “agents’ attitudes toward their own authority to speak and answer for their decisions”<sup>365</sup> – to be important for autonomy. Benson explains that autonomous agents “specially own what they do in that they are properly positioned to give voice to their reasons for acting – should others call for their reasons”<sup>366</sup>. This doesn’t mean they need to exhibit their ‘deep’ selves, be especially good at being able to ‘access’ the conditions that best explain their behaviour, or be good at forming arguments. Regardless of whether my actions are the ones I really wanted

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<sup>364</sup> I have a separate chapter, Chapter Six, on Westlund’s dialogical autonomy theory.

<sup>365</sup> Paul Benson, ‘Feminist Intuitions and the Normative Substance of Autonomy’, in *Personal Autonomy: New Essays on Personal Autonomy and Its Role in Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, ed. By James Stacey Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 124-142, p. 125.

<sup>366</sup> Benson, ‘Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in autonomous Agency’, p. 118.

to perform in line with my truest values, what matters is that I am “duly positioned to serve as the voice for those acts”<sup>367</sup>. Or, as S.I. Benn puts it, an agent’s conception of themselves as ‘author’ is essential – they are an individual who *cares* about their “ontological status as a chooser”<sup>368</sup>.

For Benson, taking ownership has an active and reflexive character. Autonomous agents aren’t simply accepting their normative authority in a passive fashion – they must gain it by claiming or seizing it<sup>369</sup>. The reflexive character gleans the self that is self-governing in this instance. He says this process depends “not only on one’s objective fitness to play the social role of potential answerer, but also on one’s regard for one’s abilities and social position”<sup>370</sup>. He mentions that this ability can be curtailed if an agent suffers “serious doubt about his own personhood” as it stops him from regarding himself as “worthy to answer for what he does by the normative standards that he accepts”<sup>371</sup>. The agent must treat themselves as “warranting that position of authority, and the complex of attitudes this involves must contribute actively to their actually having authority as answerers”<sup>372</sup>. This gives us a general idea of the importance of self-regarding attitudes as an underpinning aspect of holding oneself answerable – it seems that there is an appropriate way to regard ourselves *as* we engage in self-responsible answerability.

#### 4.4.2 Self-regarding attitudes

Self-regarding attitudes are thus necessary for self-authorization. Mackenzie talks about self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-trust as ‘self-evaluative’ conditions. She views self-respect as seeing oneself as the moral equal of others, whereas self-trust is about being able to trust one’s own convictions and judgments. The attitude of self-esteem or self-worth, is a “fundamentally evaluative stance toward oneself”<sup>373</sup> that necessitates thinking of one’s life as worthwhile. In my view, her concepts conflate self-regarding attitudes with self-evaluative ones. Not all self-regarding attitudes are self-evaluative, though all self-evaluative

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> S.I.Benn, ‘Freedom, Autonomy and the Concept of a Person’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society New Series*, 76 (1975), 109-130

<sup>369</sup> Benson, ‘Taking Ownership: Authority and Voice in autonomous Agency’, p. 110.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Mackenzie, p. 37.

attitudes are self-regarding. So I will refer to the cluster of related concepts as ‘self-regarding’, rather than self-evaluative.

I will now expand on her view by offering more detailed characterizations of self-respect, self-esteem/self-worth, and self-trust. First, I will understand self-respect as a type of recognition respect. Recognition respect is “grounded in and responsive to just those features of an object which make objects of that kind worthy of respect”<sup>374</sup>. I believe this is more or less what Mackenzie has in mind when she refers to self-respect as a regard for oneself as having equal moral status – the feature worthy of one’s recognition is one’s moral standing. Self-esteem (or self-worth – Mackenzie takes these terms to be synonymous) is a general positive sense of the self. The idea of appraisal self-respect also seems to be a species of self-esteem, in that it involves positive appraisal. But unlike self-esteem, which is general, appraisal self-respect is about a positive evaluation of a person as a character or as engaged in some specific pursuit of activity<sup>375</sup>. Finally, self-trust is about having a positive conviction about one’s own character, motivations, competences. Now these concepts often overlap, but they could also come apart. It is, for instance, possible to have recognition self-respect without appraisal self-respect.

But how are each of these concepts relevant for autonomy? Let us start with self-respect, by which I mean recognition self-respect. Self-respect involves regarding oneself as a person of equal moral status, and Mackenzie says this is part of the self-authorizing dimension of autonomy. Cases where the individual is degraded, looked down upon, or otherwise not treated as an equal will demonstrate its importance. Someone who is able to stand up for themselves within a hostile social environment would probably be seen as a self-authorizing agent – someone who retains some part of autonomy *in spite of* the obstacles in place. On the other hand, someone who is seen as lacking in self-respect – perhaps by being excessively servile, by pandering to others or being sycophantic, by cowardly delegating decisions, and so on – would probably not be regarded as very autonomous in the sense of self-authorization. And it seems pretty clear why: by being too servile, for example, we treat ourselves not as equals, but as less than equal to others, which in the context of autonomy would be bad for two reasons. First, as I’ve mentioned, we could just say this is simply not

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<sup>374</sup> Robin Dillon, ‘Toward a Feminist Conception of Self-Respect’, *Hypatia*, 7 (1992), 52-69 (p. 56).

<sup>375</sup> Stephen Darwall, ‘Two Kinds of Respect’, *Ethics*, 88 (1977), 36-49 (p. 38).

the sort of attitude compatible with a self-authorizing person. Regarding oneself as a person of equal moral standing seems in itself a necessary attitude for autonomy because only equal moral standing confirms that we have normative authority over our own lives in a way that cannot be *less than* others, and in a way that cannot be *subordinate* to others. And second, a lack of self-respect actually does put one at risk of domination, exploitation, and so on, which are states that seem to negatively implicate several dimensions of autonomy (e.g. self-determination). As Robin Dillon points out, however, there is of course the question of what instances count as one having self-respect. She says that being self-sacrificing, for instance, may not be at odds with self-respect, since it is possible to give up my interests in a self-respecting manner – that is, “knowing what I am worthy and so knowing the extent and meaning of my sacrifice”<sup>376</sup>. It is the cases of self-sacrifice where one has not in fact paid “attention...insofar as one never attends to one’s intrinsic worth as a person, nor to one’s own needs, desires, projects...”<sup>377</sup> that one fails to be self-respecting, which also puts them at risk of being exploited.

Now my first point about self-respect – that equal moral standing implies we cannot view ourselves as being of inferior normative status in order to count as self-authorizing – also implies that we cannot be superior to others, either. Does this mean we cannot act superior and be autonomous at the same time? Someone who treats others immorally obviously fails morally, but it seems they would also fail to be self-respecting and thereby fail to be self-authorizing in the way needed for autonomy. So it seems we have a problem of immorality as a failure of self-respect. How can we disentangle this problem? One way to think about this is by considering the linkages between self-determination, self-authorization, and social recognition. Earlier in the chapter, I explained that immoral actions can be self-determined even if they are not associated with valuable capabilities or functionings because being immoral can be compatible with being non-dominated. Now if one is non-dominated and is able to carry out immoral action, it seems that even if they do not *righteously* self-authorize (that is, they abuse their self-authorizing abilities to justify their conduct), their actions can still be socially recognized in such a way that protects the agent. This relation between self-authorization and social recognition is detailed in Chapter Five, where I explain that not all failures of self-respect are equally damning for one’s autonomy: I argue that only

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

*deficiencies* truly damage one's autonomy, but that certain species of failures or abuses of self-respect, like immoral action, could in principle be compatible with autonomy.

We might also treat self-respect in a different way: instead of linking it to equal moral status, we might posit that the subject of self-respect is the *self-governing and self-authorizing potential of the person*. That is, to be self-respecting one must take one's self-governing and self-authorizing potential seriously. This is more specific and less evaluative than the concept of self-esteem (taking one's self-governing and self-authorizing potential seriously does not mean one needs to hold oneself in positive esteem), and less restrictive and evaluative than the concept of appraisal self-respect (self-governing and self-authorizing potential does not specify that one appraise a specific ability or merit). Rather, one must find one's own self-governing faculties meaningful and worthy of earnest consideration. This is not to say that agents should stop regarding themselves as persons of 'equal moral standing'. But this way of conceptualizing self-respect suggests that we should not limit ourselves to the moral recognition view. Self-respect is a kind of pro-attitude an agent can have about their own self-governing and self-authorizing potential, which as we saw encompass a wide range of autonomy-relevant competences, identity, and so on. To have self-respect in this context is to appropriately and properly uphold the fact that one can be an *individual* in the senses described.

I think we can adopt a dual view of self-respect, and again apply whichever one is most fit to be applied given the context of a case. In cases of oppression, for instance, the moral recognition self-respect view will be able to capture more or less what would go wrong with autonomy if one were to lack self-respect. In cases that don't hinge on questions about equal moral standing, it may be more appropriate to invoke the second view of self-respect as an earnest regard for one's self-governing and self-authorizing potential. This latter view, I think, will be able to capture different why someone who is insouciant and ill-motivated to work on themselves seem to lack in self-respect without it necessarily being the case that they service others at their own expense or that they view themselves as moral inferiors. Rather, they lack self-respect more in this second sense of failing to engage in autonomy-conducive activity.

What about self-esteem and autonomy? I've characterized self-esteem as a general sense of positive self-worth. It seems to contribute to a positive *motivational* sense of self and

seems in that sense to contribute positively to the dimension of self-governance. If a persistent lack of self-esteem and its attendant negative self-conception prevents me from pursuing my interests and exercising my competencies, perhaps because I don't view myself as 'good enough' or 'worthy' of them, there is a clear sense in which I have thwarted or even sabotaged myself from carrying out the things I want to do. On this line of thought, then, self-esteem is normatively required for autonomy just in case it is *good* for one's autonomy. that is to say, to the extent that the positive personal psychology of self-esteem *encourages* and *motivates* people to realize their self-governance. Self-esteem, then, has a promotional value for autonomy. However, the link between self-esteem and self-governance is only as strong as the correlation between self-esteem and its instrumental outcomes: we are assuming here that it *generally* leads to productive self-governance and overall self-authorization. But it may not; perhaps it is self-governance or self-authorization that leads to self-esteem.

Let us now consider the link between appraisal self-respect and autonomy. The obvious way the two might be linked is by thinking of appraisal self-respect as an identifier of self-governance. Since appraisal self-respect is something that can be gained, nurtured, built up, and increased in accordance with the pursuit or fruition of one's goals, objectives, and skills, having appraisal self-respect seems to indicate that a person is exercising their self-governance. But, we might say, this may have little to do with autonomy after all. For instance, somebody who overworks themselves and tries to be successful only because they have been pressured to live up to a family legacy, can have appraisal self-respect (and self-esteem for that matter), but it might not be clear to us that the subject of their appraisal is based on objectives that were really their *own*, or that there wasn't a kind of undue background pressure that strikes us as counter to autonomy in an important sense.

Finally, let us consider self-trust. Self-trust is, according to Trudy Govier, about valuing oneself "for those things that make one a person: one's consciousness, will, ability to choose, capacities, and abilities"<sup>378</sup>. To lack it would mean that "a person cannot think and decide for himself or herself and therefore cannot function as an autonomous human being"<sup>379</sup>. I think this rings true, though I believe my construal of self-respect as earnest consideration of one's self-governing and self-authorizing potential can already capture this idea without being open

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<sup>378</sup> Trudy Govier, 'Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem', *Hypatia*, 8 (1993), 99-120 (p. 110).

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

to the vulnerability of its ‘evaluative’ aspect. That is, it seems self-trust allows for a greater margin of error when it comes to how a person values herself: because it is about valuing based on one’s own *perceptions* of one’s own competencies, rather than on the basis of equality, it looks like someone could trust themselves in mistaken ways *not* conducive to self-authorization. For instance, someone could be manipulated to believe they have the right amount of self-trust when really they have too little. Because it is self-evaluative it is difficult to know whether one’s estimation of one’s abilities and their conviction in their competencies are in fact reliable. And because self-trust covers any perceived competency operating in the individual, it seems there are more ways to get it wrong. It is also not clear how it is advantaged over self-distrust. For instance, that an agent has the appropriate self-distrust about the amount of drink they could handle at a party seems to benefit them by keeping them from derailing commitments not to stay out late or drive while tipsy. We can think of other cases where self-distrust is actually necessary for autonomy. But it would be difficult to think of cases where self-disrespect would be necessary for autonomy.

To summarize self-authorization, I accepted Mackenzie’s adoption of Andrea Westlund’s dialogical account of autonomy for the element of accountability, and said that self-regarding attitudes are just as important for self-authorization. However, Mackenzie adopts many of these concepts without in-depth exploration of how they relate to the dimension of autonomy. So I expanded on Mackenzie’s comments on self-regard by commenting on how recognition self-respect, self-esteem/self-worth, and self-trust might relate to autonomy.

#### **4.5 Social recognition**

In this section, I will talk about social recognition as a distinct dimension of autonomy. Though Mackenzie posited that social recognition falls under the axis of self-authorization, I separate the aspect of social recognition in order to highlight its relationship to all of the aforementioned dimensions: self-determination, self-governance, and self-determination. Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth present a good case for including recognition as part of autonomy. They say that autonomy “represents an emergent property of individuals as the bearers of certain socially situated capabilities”<sup>380</sup>. As individuals, we are vulnerable each step of the way to autonomy due to possible “undermining injustices” such

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<sup>380</sup> Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, ‘Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition, and Justice’, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, ed. By John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 127-149, p. 137.



as material deprivation and disruptions “in the social nexus that are necessary for autonomy”<sup>381</sup>. Like Mackenzie, they say that agentic competencies which make up autonomy requires one to be able to hold certain attitudes towards oneself, which depends also on the attitudes of others. What we need to recognize is that, despite terms like *self-respect* and *self-esteem* being in a literal sense about the agent’s own attitudes, it is “not a matter of a solitary ego reflecting on itself, but is the result of an ongoing intersubjective process, in which one’s attitude toward oneself emerges in one’s encounter with an other’s attitude toward oneself”<sup>382</sup>.

As their discussion takes place in the context of justice, they talk about protecting the autonomy of individuals with “protection against threats of denigration”<sup>383</sup>. For Anderson and Honneth, autonomy is facilitated by certain ‘relations-to-self’ such as self-respect, which as we’ve pointed out requires social recognition. While it may be possible to sustain self-worth in the face of hostile or unaccommodating social environments, it will be hard to do so, and there will be “significant costs associated with having to shield oneself from these negative attitudes and having to find subcultures for support”<sup>384</sup>. While the individual might be successful in navigating these hostile impositions, “the question of justice is whether the burden is fair”<sup>385</sup>.

I can accept this social recognition model of autonomy, as well as the link made between social recognition and self-regarding attitudes. But I would like to make some additional points. First, social recognition has an important link to *all* of the other dimensions of autonomy identified, including self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization. As such, the dimension of social recognition is an important category in its own right, and one that is interrelated to other dimensions of autonomy. Second, it is important to note that while social recognition and self-regarding attitudes interact and overlap, they are also able to come apart.

Let us first address the relationship social recognition has to the other dimensions of autonomy. For self-determination, we looked at different types of freedom, including

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

freedom as non-domination. It is clear that the dimension of social recognition is involved in justifications about subjecting people to interferences, subjugating them, dominating them, and so on. Who we recognize as worthy of respect and freedom partly comprises how respected and free one actually is. It also seems that many of the liberties and opportunities Mackenzie cited would depend on social recognition for *effectiveness* too. Say, for instance, that a member of a stigmatized group stumbles across a job opportunity that they are qualified for. However, the uptake of this opportunity must be ‘recognized’ in the relevant sense in order for them to have a real chance at realizing it. Take implicit bias, for example. It could be that an employer might “explicitly entertain nonprejudiced thoughts about a member of a stigmatized group while unconsciously making cognitive associations with negative evaluations or stereotypic traits”<sup>386</sup>. At the surface level, nothing has gone awry – the agent who applied for the job did all they could do, with the understanding that the employer will exercise their own discretion about who they want to hire. That an employer might arbitrarily but subconsciously discriminate against a job candidate is difficult to really characterize as a lack of opportunity. But with the dimension of social recognition we can frame this in terms of a lack of social recognition, which can clearly decrease the effectiveness of the opportunities made available to people. Because unconscious discrimination fails to bestow the agent with proper recognition, the agent recipient to this encounters a partial loss of self-determination.

For self-governance, social recognition is important because the agent’s authenticity and competence conditions can be interpreted differentially from the outside. Depending on the way someone’s decision making set or background is recognized, people can have their choices allowed or permitted, or on the contrary disregarded or disapproved of. So the *value* attached to individual autonomous decisions can change based on social recognition. I believe social recognition in this way can explain and iron out some of the conflicting intuitions that arise with some cases of autonomy. For example, we may appropriately socially recognize personal religious decisions as self-governing, but appropriately not grant recognition to decisions seen as part of a mental illness, because the *values* of individual decisions are subject to varying normative standards which warrant differential social recognition. This can explain why, with cases of decisions made on the basis of oppressive

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<sup>386</sup> Jules Holroyd, ‘Responsibility for Implicit Bias’, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 43 (2012), 274-306 (p. 275).

norms, we want to problematize those decisions regardless of their being products of properly functioning self-governing faculties: it isn't that the agent is stunted in their critical skills, but rather that we hesitate to attach equal value to decisions made on the basis of oppressive norms. Of course, one may argue that self-governance can be hampered directly by a lack of proper social recognition. For Natalie Stoljar, for instance, one way that oppressive social scripts "interfere with psychological freedom"<sup>387</sup> is by inducing the agents affected to adapt their decision-making to fit the narrative. Such oppressive structures in the social environment, which reinforce the dominant/subordinate relationship, provide the agent with a "set of reasons that justifies her engaging in [subordinating] actions"<sup>388</sup> which agents might then follow to the impairment of their self-governance.

Let us now consider self-authorization. Social recognition seems integral to the aspect of accountability and answerability because these factors, whilst having a self-referential component (like taking responsibility over oneself), is also relational. When we engage in a dialogical exchange and give each other critical feedback or hold one another accountable, it is necessary that we recognize the persons involved, and to value what they have to say, to take seriously their justifications for their actions, to take in earnest individual reasons, and so on. It would amount to a kind of incoherence to ask someone to account for themselves if we do not at the same time regard them as worthy interlocutors. As for the aspect of self-regarding attitudes, it is clear that social recognition can enable or support them, and the lack thereof the opposite; as Robin Dillon says, "a person's lacking self-respect... is an integral part of both her personal relationships and the social structures to which certain classes of persons are relegated and in which they are generally denied respect, thus coming to view themselves as not worthy of even their own respect"<sup>389</sup>. There are many ways that one's self-authorization can be threatened by the social environment, which is perhaps why Mackenzie was motivated to attach social recognition so closely with self-authorization. Paul Benson points out, to give an example, that the threat to autonomy by being subject to stereotype threat (which describes one being at risk of self-confirming a negative stereotype

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<sup>387</sup> Natalie Stoljar, 'Living Constantly at Tiptoe Stance': Social Scripts, Psychological Freedom, and Autonomy', in *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression*, ed. by Marina Oshana (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 105-123, p. 107.

<sup>388</sup> Jennifer Warriner, 'Gender Oppression and Weak Substantive Theories of Autonomy', in *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression*, ed. by Marina Oshana (New York: Routledge, 2015) pp. 25- 47, p. 27.

<sup>389</sup> Robin S. Dillon, 'How to Lose Your Self-Respect', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 29 (1992), 125-139 (p. 125).

assigned to one's group) is "not categorically different from the interference of a more overt but equally disruptive physical or psychological threat"<sup>390</sup>. He says that an agent's "motivation, effort, attention, cognitive capacity, or emotional state"<sup>391</sup> can be diminished by their self-conscious, self-confirming response to negative stereotypes about their social identity. One thing I would like to mention, however, is that self-authorization and social recognition can come apart – this is important because it seems to me that being able to retain appropriate self-regarding attitudes *in spite of* failures to have them socially recognized is in itself an authoritative personal stance compatible with self-authorization and autonomy.

#### 4.6 Quantitative factors

I have now laid out my interpretations of Mackenzie's various dimensions of autonomy – these dimensions laid out the qualities of autonomy. Before I close this chapter, I would like to highlight a way that might help us think through the qualitative dimensions of autonomy discussed throughout this chapter. It is clear that the dimensions of autonomy – self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and social recognition – are variables that interact, overlap, enhance, and may even be in tension with one another. As we saw back in Chapter One, what the multidimensional approach allows us to do is to arrive at an approximation of autonomy in difficult or complicated cases. Now consideration of *quantitative* factors give us a further way to grade the ascription of autonomy. These are *temporality* and *pervasiveness*: they can be thought of as quantitative factors that oversee the qualitative factors discussed above in context. Temporality concerns the duration of someone's decisions, arrangements, and so on. How we judge some restriction or constraint can hinge on how long the agent is bound or committed to some choice. Pervasiveness also matters: the impact that any one decision has on the individual's overall life will also give us indications as to how autonomous they are. It seems that intuitions about autonomy are affected according to the breadth of one's choices, with trivial items having less of an overall impact than a radical or life-changing decision.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

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<sup>390</sup> Paul Benson, 'Stereotype Threat, Social Belonging, and Relational Autonomy', in *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression*, ed. by Marina Oshana (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 124-141, p. 129.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

Overall, I adopted many features of Mackenzie's three-dimensional analysis. I made several revisions which I think enhance the theory. For the aspect of self-determination, I suggested that we look to freedom as non-domination to help us think through the issue of paternalistic threat as well as immoral action. For self-governance, I suggested that we should take a flexible view on authenticity conditions, treating them as useful ways to test or approximate the alignment between the agent and their action rather than as a *precise* method of uncovering the self of self-governance. For the competence conditions attached to self-governance, I took inspiration from Diana Tietjens Meyers' autonomy competency view, which talks about coordinated skills that help bring personal, complex activities into fruition. I further suggested that the relationship between competencies and autonomy could vary widely, and as such proposed a taxonomy of three types that relate to autonomy: potential, dispositional, and executive competence. As for self-authorization, I clarified and expanded on Mackenzie's view by exploring exactly how different types of self-regarding attitudes are linked to autonomy. Finally, I suggested that social recognition is a dimension on its own because it relates to each dimension of autonomy – self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization – in equally relevant ways. I conclude by saying these qualitative dimensions, along with the quantitative factors of temporality and pervasiveness mentioned in the previous section, can be considered together to approximate individual autonomy. Thus, the qualities of self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and social recognition, and their quantities, sufficiently expressed, together form the mutually interacting elements that make up autonomy.



## PART TWO





## 5

### Autonomy and Normative Competence

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I critically analyse Natalie Stoljar's normative competence account of autonomy. A valuable insight of Stoljar's account is that it spells out quite plainly why procedural or content-neutral theories of autonomy are flawed from a feminist perspective. Her claim is that procedural theories cannot explain what she calls the feminist intuition – on which preferences based on “oppressive norms of femininity”<sup>392</sup> cannot be autonomous – because procedural theories do not straightforwardly rule out oppressive norms as invalid decision making inputs. She uses Kristin Luker's study of contraceptive risk-takers (CRs) as a test case. Stoljar claims her *normative competence* account can explain the feminist intuition, because it requires true belief and critical reflection which would exclude oppressive norms as decision making inputs.

While I agree with Stoljar's critique that purely procedural theories fail to address the problem of oppression for autonomy, my view is that her normative competence account is equally problematic. This is because the notion of normative competence fails to distinguish between the autonomy of the oppressors, and the autonomy of the oppressed. Stoljar may have accounted for the feminist intuition, but fails to explain this other issue, which I dub ‘the second feminist intuition’. This is the intuition that there is an asymmetry of autonomy between those who oppress, and those who are oppressed.

I argue that application of my hybrid multidimensional account can adequately explain Stoljar's feminist intuition *and* account for the second feminist intuition. I will use Diana Tietjens Meyers profile of the unregenerate macho male (MM) as my test case. By analysing and comparing the CRs and MM with special attention to their self-authorization and social recognition dimensions of autonomy, I am able to corroborate the asymmetry between them. As such, I contend that my approach is preferable to the normative competence view.

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<sup>392</sup> Natalie Stoljar, ‘Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition’, in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. By Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 94-111, p. 95.

## 5.2 Issues with purely procedural approaches

Natalie Stoljar distinguishes what she calls traditional theories of autonomy from procedural theories of autonomy. Like many other feminist philosophers, Stoljar points out that traditional theories of autonomy are problematic because they conflate the idea of the autonomous agent with an independent and self-sufficient one. Against this background, she recognizes that procedural theories hold appeal for many feminists because they contain the feature of content-neutrality. She characterizes a standard procedural account of autonomy as such: an agent's decision is autonomous if and only if the process of formation of the decision has satisfied certain standards of critical reflection. This standard procedural account bases itself on a *formal* criteria, making autonomy compatible with the adoption of all sorts of preferences, including socialized preferences, preferences for care, dependence, and obedience. This allows for acceptance of a greater diversity of preferences as autonomous.

Despite this appeal, Stoljar cautions against favouring purely procedural accounts. While the procedural account holds attractiveness for its inclusivity, it may be *too* inclusive in certain cases – specifically, under circumstances of oppression. Because they are purely formal in their structure, there is no reason in principle that they could not be compatible with the internalization of oppressive norms. They fail to capture the problematic relationship between oppression and autonomy.

## 5.3 The feminist intuition

To flesh out her point, Stoljar considers a study detailed in Kristin Luker's book, *Taking Chances*. The task of Luker's study was to find out why women who have access to freely available methods of contraception end up having unwanted pregnancies and go through with elective abortions thereafter. The women in the study did not become pregnant due to ignorance, lack of skills, or access to contraception<sup>393</sup>. Luker's aim was to challenge the response that one might have toward Luker's subjects – that they are irrational, for example. Luker claimed that these women bargained with themselves over the costs and benefits of using contraception and ultimately decided to take the risk. The prevalence of irrationality in these women was no more noteworthy than irrationality among the general population for making risky decisions, such as smokers. Luker thus defended the rationality

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

of her subjects by arguing that the women's behaviour resulting in unwanted pregnancies were reasonable given their own views about the circumstances. Henceforth, I will refer to the case of contraceptive risk-takers as CRs.

Although Luker's vindication of her subjects takes place within the context of rational choice theory, Stoljar takes the example to correspond to discussion about personal autonomy. Stoljar's claim is that Luker's subjects trigger the feminism intuition because they are motivated by "oppressive and misguided norms that are internalized as a result of feminine socialization"<sup>394</sup>. The feminist intuition applies to Luker's subjects because of the way such norms have played a part in the decision to take contraceptive risks. Stoljar lists some of the motivations leading to the decision to take contraceptive risk, cited from interviews with Luker's subjects: it is inappropriate for women to have active sex lives, it is unseemly for women to plan for and initiate sex, it is wrong to engage in premarital sex, pregnancy and childbearing promote one's worthiness as a woman, it is normal for women to bargain for their marriage by proving their fertility to their partners or their partners' families, women are worthwhile marriage partners only if they are capable of childbearing<sup>395</sup>. The feminist intuition only rears its head in the case of contraceptive risk-takers because the norms they have internalized have 'criticizable contents', which include norms of religion, femininity, and sexuality oppressive to women<sup>396</sup>.

Stoljar believes the example of Luker's subjects highlight the shortcoming of procedural theories with respect to explanation of the feminist intuition. According to Stoljar, Luker's subjects would count as autonomous according to procedural theories. Stoljar takes us through various necessary conditions for autonomy that have been put forward by different procedural accounts. These include *counterfactual conditions*, *internal coherence*, *endorsement*, *self-knowledge*, and *inhibiting factors*<sup>397</sup>. Luker's subjects, according to Stoljar, are able to satisfy these relevant procedural criteria for autonomy and cannot be ruled non-autonomous on a procedural basis. Ergo, procedural theories are ineffective for explaining why the feminist intuition persists. At this point, it seems the proceduralist can either accept

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>397</sup> I do not go into detail about all of these conditions. What Stoljar conveys in her work is that for each one of these conditions, Luker's subjects *would* satisfy them.

the feminist intuition and adopt a more substantive approach to autonomy, or reject the feminist intuition altogether.

Accepting the feminist intuition would be to acknowledge the incompleteness of the procedural criteria. In other words, we would “reject the position that procedural conditions are sufficient for autonomy”<sup>398</sup>. I do not think proceduralists can accept that the feminist intuition holds without recourse to a more substantive account to explain why the CRs should be excluded from counting as autonomous. Simply assenting that the CRs seem non-autonomous in spite of satisfying procedural standards would amount to cherry-picking, which defeats the inclusive principle underlying content-neutrality *not* to arbitrarily discriminate individual’s choices as non-autonomous. But adding non-procedural qualifications to a procedural theory would be self-defeating. Proceduralists could not explain the autonomy-diminishing potential of oppressive norms in their frame without invoking substantive values that depart from their paradigmatic commitment to content-neutrality.

Now the proceduralist can simply deny that there is a feminist intuition at all. However, rejecting the intuition would terminate further investigation of the thesis that non-procedural factors (e.g. oppressive norms) may have a negative impact on autonomy. This would be an unsatisfactory outcome, as it fails to treat that thesis in earnest.

#### **5.4 Stoljar’s response to the feminist intuition.**

Stoljar claims that a strongly substantive theory of autonomy can account for the sense that Luker’s study subjects are non-autonomous with respect to their risky contraceptive decisions. The subjects lack *normative competence*, on which agents must be capable of criticizing “courses of action competently by relevant normative standards”<sup>399</sup> – this requires *true* beliefs and the ability to reflect critically on one’s decisions. She points out that, “Women who accept the norm that pregnancy and motherhood increase their worthiness accept something *false*. And because of the internalization of the norm, they do not have the capacity to perceive it as false.”<sup>400</sup> This is a missing insight on procedural accounts.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

Even if we are convinced by the feminist intuition, however, we might question whether Stoljar's specific test case actually raises the feminist intuition. Elizabeth Sperry's critique of feminist strong substantive autonomy (FSSA) includes Stoljar's view, which she says "tends to attribute heteronomy to the oppressed without sufficient investigation"<sup>401</sup>. Sperry claims that Stoljar's account actually fails to attend to the agents' "inner processes nor to their psychological states, nor to the sociotemporal context in which agents' choice-making unfolds"<sup>402</sup>. Sperry claims that in the example of Luker's CRs, we have two interpretations open to us: on one, the CRs took the risk because they were motivated by norms whereby proving their fertility promote their worthiness as "real women". But on a different interpretation, "Luker's interviewees knew their potential mates would consider them "real women" only if they proved their fertility. A marriage-seeking woman – and in the 1960s women had powerful economic and social reasons to seek marriage – had to contend with men's values"<sup>403</sup>. While such choices may be difficult, agents still 'bargain with patriarchy' on reasonable desires for security and safety, grounded on their own beliefs in their equal worth. Furthermore, Sperry points out that Stoljar overlooks the fact that some of Luker's women actually acknowledged themselves to be risk-oriented types. For example, one of the interviewees talked about how she stopped using contraception because the burden of responsibility kept her from enjoying sex, which Sperry characterizes as "a protest against, rather than a capitulation to, deformed desires"<sup>404</sup>. So while *some* of Luker's CRs may be acting self-doubtingly on deformed desires, not all of them fit that mold.

I think Sperry may well be right that Stoljar's approach can be criticized because it would misattribute heteronomy in cases where individual nuance would suggest the opposite. I think Sperry touches on an important point, which is that normative competence has issues adequately differentiating between cases. In the next section, I will make this point in a different way to critique Stoljar's approach.

## 5.5 The second feminist intuition

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<sup>401</sup> Elizabeth Sperry, 'Dupes of Patriarchy: Feminist Strong Substantive Autonomy's Epistemological Weaknesses', *Hypatia*, 28 (2013), 887-904 (p. 888).

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., p. 896.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

In the previous section, I gave a brief overview of Elizabeth Sperry's critique of Stoljar's account, in which she pointed out that normative competence is prone to misattribute heteronomy. Normative competence is too restrictive with regard to agents under oppression because it does not consider the possibility that agents can be under oppression *without* having adopted oppressive norms or "deformed" desires. But there's another way that normative competence is too restrictive: it is restrictive in misattributing heteronomy to both agents *under oppression*, and agents who are *oppressors*. This is worrisome, as it seems no feminist account of autonomy, including Stoljar's, should treat the oppressed and the oppressor as symmetrically non-autonomous. At the very least, it would be counterintuitive to treat them as symmetrical cases: this is the 'second' feminist intuition.

For my critique of Stoljar, I raise a relevant counterexample, which I base off Diana Tietjens Meyers' profile of the 'macho male' (MM). For my purposes, I treat the MM as symmetrical to Luker's CRs with respect to their both being cases of a lack of normative competence. So my rendition of the CRs remains faithful to Stoljar's interpretation, rather than Sperry's. I do this to show that even if the normative competence account has explanatory value in the case of the CRs that *are* problematic with respect to autonomy, there are still *other* cases of failures in normative competence, like the MM, which Stoljar's account cannot adequately explain. The scope of what normative competence captures as cases of non-autonomy is not nuanced enough to capture the sense that there is an asymmetry of autonomy between the oppressor (e.g. MM) and the oppressed (e.g. the CRs).

I will argue that my own multidimensional view can explain the asymmetry of autonomy between them in a way that the normative competence account fails to do. What the CRs and the MM differ with respect to are their levels of self-authorization and social recognition.

### **5.5.1 The unregenerate macho male**

To preface my counterexample, I will give an overview of the context in which Diana Tietjens Meyers discusses the MM. Meyers helpfully distinguishes between two competing conceptions of self-respect. On one view – the *moral* view – self-respect is a kind of moral duty one has to oneself to maintain one's own dignity. The moral view denies that self-respect can be excessive, unjustified, or undesirable. On the other view – *psychological* self-respect – self-respect is a matter of whether one does what one deems worthy of oneself. This

view is thereby compatible with immoral conduct. On the psychological view, it is possible to inflate one's self-regard, so it can be excessive. The tension between these two accounts is that the moral view would only count as respectable the morally autonomous self, whereas the psychological view would count *any* self as respect-worthy so long as that self meets one's own standard of respect-worthiness.

According to Meyers, the unregenerate MM embodies an example of psychological self-respect that evades moral scrutiny. The MM is expected to overpower his wife, in some cases beat her to remind her of her place, all the while respecting himself for this immoral conduct. On the moral view, this self would be viewed as morally wanting, since a "socially condoned self"<sup>405</sup> cannot be a proper object of self-respect. Meyers' own view is that the macho male's failure to be self-respecting stems from the way he premises his self-respect on a "non-autonomously adopted and immoral role"<sup>406</sup>. She says this failure is marked by the macho male's blindness to the cruelty of his conduct, which is a result of acceptance of sexist social convention, and the fact that he aims his respect at this social convention rather than a "self governing agent"<sup>407</sup>.

This characterization of the MM can be applied to Stoljar's normative competence account. The MM's blind adherence to social convention would be the equivalent of having adopted a false norm and lacking true belief. Moreover, by barring himself from recognizing the error of his ways, he foregoes the possibility of separating his "true self" from the socially conventional self – the self that is violent to women. Thus, under terms of Stoljar's normative competence, he lacks the ability to criticize the content of the norms he has adopted and to assess them critically. Stoljar's account does its work here in revealing how the macho male's socialization atrophied his normative competence. Now the point of overlap to take away from this is the following: the CR and MM both lack normative competence. It appears as though the comparison is symmetrical. And because they both lack normative competence, they appear to *both* be non-autonomous on Stoljar's account.

### 5.5.2 Asymmetry of autonomy

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<sup>405</sup> Diana Tietjens Meyers, 'Self-Respect and Autonomy', in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect ed.* By Robin Dillon (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 230.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

I maintain, however, that there is an *asymmetry* of autonomy at play. Because Stoljar would be committed to the symmetrical view, she fails to capture what I call the second feminist intuition, which I base on the claim that there is a difference between the autonomy of the oppressor and the autonomy of the oppressed.

I will argue for this asymmetry by claiming that the MM is less compromised with respect to the self-authorization and social recognition dimensions of his autonomy, and that my multidimensional account can capture this particularly well. I do this in four steps. First, I will preface why analysis of the self-authorization and social recognition dimensions are particularly apposite for my purposes. Next, I diverge from Meyers' diagnosis of the macho male as deficient in self-respect, showing that he maintains self-respect, if not an excess of self-respect. Furthermore, I consider whether the more evaluative idea of self-esteem can illuminate further differences between the CRs and the MM. Finally, I move onto the dimension of social recognition to establish the asymmetry. By the end, I will have demonstrated that the MM satisfies the self-authorization and social recognition dimensions in ways that the CRs do not.

### **5.5.3 Autonomy, normative competence, and false belief**

First, I'll take a look at Suzy Killmister's view on false beliefs, which bring out ways that Stoljar's normative competence account fails to account for nuances in different cases. This critique will help us anticipate ways that the dimension of self-authorization and social recognition might help us differentiate between the MM and the CR.

Take Killmister's idea of tertiary false belief, which is a false belief about one's own moral worth that guides one's action. Killmister argues that tertiary false beliefs do not necessarily undermine autonomy – rather it is low self-regard in itself that compromises autonomy. The detriment to autonomy is not corrected even if the self-regarding belief happened to be true.

There are also cases in which false beliefs not only fail to diminish autonomy, but enhance it. According to Killmister, autonomy requires that I take action A to be 'practically



available' to me<sup>408</sup>. In some cases, a false belief will bring about a belief that action A is practically available, whereas a true belief might bring about a belief that A is unavailable to me. She uses the example of an agent confronted with a crevasse in attempt to escape a bushfire. If the agent believes truly that the leap is 3 meters wide, they become paralyzed with fear and the option ceases to be available to them. If on the other hand the agent believes falsely that it is 2 meters wide, the action may become available to them. So it seems in cases like this, a false belief opens up "scope for autonomous action that would be closed off if I had a true belief"<sup>409</sup>.

Now this division of false beliefs is not made at all clear in Stoljar's account. But if it is possible that some false beliefs can be adopted without diminishing autonomy, we might think of nuancing Stoljar's account in the following way. To establish asymmetry between the MM and the CR, we posit that the MM's false belief, i.e. that being macho inflates his moral worth, is a tertiary type of false belief that fails to undermine his autonomy because it allows for certain options to become available to him. The CRs' tertiary false beliefs, e.g. that fertility determines worth, undermines autonomy; but this is not due to falsity per se. Rather, the detriment is caused by the type of undervaluing in which the subjects are engaged. It looks like falsity, the relevant variable on the normative competence account, isn't really the factor tracking autonomy. The relationship between tertiary false belief and autonomy is not 'sensitive' to true belief, but rather the kinds of factors under consideration in self-authorization. An analysis of these normative factors will be possible by thinking through the dimensions of self-authorization and social recognition.

## 5.6 Self-authorization and self-respect

We've just reviewed a perspective that suggests self-regard may be the variable which affects the status of a false belief with respect to autonomy. In this part of the section I will consider the idea of self-respect. We saw in section 5.5.1 that Diana Tietjens Meyers' diagnoses the macho male as being deficient in moral self-respect, though perhaps not in the psychological sense. Though she thinks the moral view of self-respect is perhaps too restrictive, the MM still counts as deficient in self-respect on her view because the subject of his self-respect is *unwarranted*. The sexist social identity that comprises the subject of the

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<sup>408</sup> Suzy Killmister, 'Autonomy and false beliefs', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 164 (2013), 513-531 (p. 528).

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

MM's respect would be 'unworthy'. Thus, Meyers' view will commit us to the claim that the MM is deficient in self-respect. By contrast, I want to claim that he isn't deficient in self-respect, but rather has a pathological excess of self-respect. In my view, only a deficiency of self-respect undermines self-authorization, whereas an excess does not. If my view holds, I will be able to explain the MM's advantage with respect to the dimension of self-authorization. This will make it possible to partially answer for the second feminist intuition: the MM in his position as an 'oppressor' has self-authorization in relative excess, whereas the CR are compromised with respect to self-authorization.

Recall that my view of self-authorization posits self-regarding attitudes (being able to hold oneself in a certain regard) and self-responsibility (being able to hold oneself to account) as constituents. Let us first assess self-regarding attitudes in the case of the CR. It seems that the feminine sexual norms involved in their contraceptive decision-making tended to downplay their normative authority as women in charge of their own sexuality. They were discouraged from initiating sex, planning for sex, and so on, to the point that they would rather get pregnant and get elective abortions thereafter than to make use of birth control. I think if we are only concerned with addressing Stoljar's feminist intuition, the purely moral view of self-respect seems to provide an explanation of what's going on without recourse to normative competence. The CR is deficient in self-respect because they fail to regard themselves as morally equal choosers in the realm of contraceptive decision-making. This is as much a moral failing as it is a failure of self-authorization. Because the oppressive norms internalized by the CRs damage self-authorization in this way, they are to that extent deficient in self-respect and diminished at the very least in the self-authorization dimension of autonomy.

A concern is, however, that the moral view may not yield us a satisfactory answer if we also want to account for the second feminist intuition. This is because the MM would probably also be diagnosed as deficient in self-respect on the moral view. Since the MM does not abide by his moral self but rather chooses to make a sexist social identity the subject of his respect, he fails to be self-respecting. We are thus unable to capture the asymmetry between the CR and the MM on such accounts, since the CR and the MM equally fall short of self-respect, albeit in different ways and for different reasons.

One way to establish asymmetry is to adopt a relatively morally neutral version of self-respect. As I pointed out in a previous chapter, making the subject of self-respect not one's moral status but instead *one's self-governing and self-authorizing potential* would allow us to maintain cases of immorality as autonomous, since self-respect no longer hinges on whether the agent treats themselves as an equal moral agent in the playing field. That is, being self-respecting would not, in this case, require one to abide by conduct that must be expected of a person who views themselves as a moral equal to others<sup>410</sup>. This view succeeds in capturing the asymmetry: the CRs fail to have self-respect because their internalization of self-abnegating norms literally prevent them from exercising their own input into the decisions around contraceptive risk-taking. They undercut their own self-governing potential by delegating choice-making, and we could claim further that they exhibit a substandard degree of accountability. On the other hand, the MM's conduct does not raise much suspicion that they fail to respect themselves as self-governing and self-authorizing persons.

However, the view above perhaps goes the other way – where a moral view of self-respect excluded the MM from self-authorization, what we've lost in adopting the more neutral view is the sense that the MM's conduct is autonomous but *morally objectionable*. On the view I've presented in the previous paragraph, I would have to qualify the MM's self-respect somehow, to show that he represents an inflated and pathological sense of self-respect. To continue to defend the idea that one can be both immoral and autonomous, I think the MM's self-respect needs to be qualified by framing it in terms of an excess – excess in the moral sense of self-respect. This way, we will be able to vitiate the MM's conduct so as not to appear to imply that *his* way of self-authorization is a kind of ideal functioning or telos of his autonomous capacity, but we will also not be suggesting that he fails to be self-authorizing and thereby non-autonomous.

Recall that Meyers mentioned that the *moral* view of self-respect denies that self-respect can be in 'excess'. This is the claim I want to deny. I think it is possible to contrast our two cases by saying that the MM does exhibit an excess of self-respect whereas the CR

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<sup>410</sup> Presumably, viewing oneself as a moral equal to others must constitute the strict condition that one satisfy some basic standards of decency, which would exclude treating others with disrespect, bringing others to intentional harm, and so on. If treating oneself as a moral equal meant anything less than this, it seems like what we claim as recognition of moral status would really just be an endorsement of self-chosen standards, which I take are not stringent enough to count as *moral* self-recognition.

exhibits a deficiency of self-respect. I believe it will be important to frame it in such terms because the manner in which the MM's self-respect is 'pathological' yet compatible with autonomy is intimately tied to a specifically *moral* overestimation of himself. But let us return to Meyers' comment. At first blush, it seems counterintuitive to claim one can have too much moral or recognition self-respect. In everyday language, uttering sentences like 'I have too much self-respect to resort to that' is usually taken to convey that one has *just the right amount* of self-respect, rather than too much of it. Oftentimes having too much self-respect is meant as a kind of moral indignation, a denial that one is willing to morally acquit oneself in relation to a potential act, and as a moral self-affirmation that one sees oneself as the moral equal of others, rather than their superiors. But if we take such a phrase to mean that one respects their own equal moral standing in excess, the utterance seems incoherent. This is because treating oneself as an equal moral agent already entails there is a standard that places all agents on an equal plane. It is implausible to take someone who says that have too much self-respect to be saying that they see themselves as being 'more' of an equal moral agent than others. I take it this is why Meyers' would deny that one can have excess self-respect on the more moral view of self-respect.

Still, one option we have to make sense of 'excess' self-respect is to weaken our moral or recognition view of self-respect by divorcing the concept of treating oneself as a moral equal, from treating others as moral equals. Call this *agent-specific self-respect*. On this amendment, the notion of excess self-respect simply presides over cases where one treats oneself as a person of equal moral standing but fails to treat others as moral equals. Thus, one has excess because one has self-respect in isolation: the priority of respect falls only over oneself. A deficiency of self-respect would imply the opposite: cases where one treats others as moral equals but fails to treat oneself as a moral equal. In this case, the person attaches too little priority to the self that is the subject of respect – that is, they fail to exercise agent-specific self-respect – making one deficient. Self-respect, then, would be cases where this inequality is not present: where one both views oneself as a person of moral standing *and* views others as moral equals.

### **5.7 Evaluative self-respect**

But why couldn't we just say that the MM is a case of someone who is *deficient* in recognition self-respect but has high psychological self-respect, and self-esteem? Could we

also not raise a scepticism about the characterization of the CRs by saying that even if they are deficient in recognition self-respect, that they too could have high psychological self-respect and self-esteem? If this line of thought can be pursued it looks like the MM and the CRs are on even ground once more – it looks like they are both deficient relative to moral or recognition self-respect, and not necessarily deficient relative to psychological self-respect or self-esteem. If we're thinking in terms of self-esteem, it even looks like we could think of a scenario in which the MM *resents* the wife-beating side of himself but cannot help exhibit macho manliness because he believes his self-respect would be threatened. In this scenario it looks like the MM lacks self-esteem.

It looks like once we focus on agents' self-esteem, an evaluative type of self-respect, it surely looks like it will be possible to set up the cases to be asymmetrical in the other direction (i.e. with the MM being on the deficient side of self-authorization) or for them to be symmetrical cases after all (that is, equal with respect to self-authorization or lack thereof), in which case we end up right where Stoljar left off. So how might we explain these non-paradigmatic versions of our cases, like a self-resenting MM?

In the psychological literature, there are diverging claims about the relationship between self-esteem and antisocial behaviour like violent behaviour. The common-sense view is that low self-esteem is a predictor of violent behaviour<sup>411</sup>. However, some researchers suggest that “favourable self-regard is linked to violence in one sphere after another”<sup>412</sup>. Baumeister notes, for instance, that “...wife beaters, violent youth gangs, aggressive nations, and other categories of violent people are all marked by strongly held views of their own superiority”<sup>413</sup>. Interestingly, it is suggested that self-esteem among youth gangs and other such groups “conforms to a zero-sum pattern”, meaning that accrual of status and respect of one person “detracts from what is available for anyone else”<sup>414</sup>. Some of these features seem to match the MM profile. But the interrelation between high self-esteem and antisocial

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<sup>411</sup> Michael K. Ostrowsky, ‘Are Violent People More Likely to Have Low Self-Esteem or High Self-Esteem?’, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 15 (2010), 69-75 (p. 71).

<sup>412</sup> Roy F. Baumeister, Brad J. Bushman, and W. Keith Campbell, ‘Self-esteem, narcissism, and aggression: does violence stem from low self-esteem or threatened egotism?’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(2000), 26-29 (p. 26).

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Roy F. Baumeister, Laura Smart, and Joseph M. Boden, ‘Relation of Threatened Egotism to Violence and Aggression: The Dark Side of High Self-Esteem’, *Psychological Review*, 10 (1996), 5-33 (p. 5).

behaviour is far from straightforward. A study by Diane Goldstein and Alan Rosenbaum on the self-esteem of wife-abusing men relative to nonabusive men from both ‘satisfactory and discordant relationships’ suggested that abuse is “associated with deficiencies in the self-esteem of the abusive husband”<sup>415</sup>, who were likely to also interpret their wives’ behaviour as damaging or threatening to their self-esteem. My surveying here is, of course, brief. I think it should perhaps show any claims about the self-esteem or self-disesteem of the MM will need to answer to the controversial empirical landscape of the topics at hand, because it asks about the causal relation between one’s self-esteem – a purely evaluative and psychological concept – and their conduct. The evaluative concept does not ask whether the conduct exhibits or conforms to a *normative* standard of self-respect but focuses entirely on how the agent perceives their station.

I am willing to concede that my claim to link higher self-authorization to the MM profile may be weakened given the possibility that the correlative link between, say, self-esteem with the MM and self-disesteem with the CR is precarious or tentative. However, objections based on self-esteem do not necessarily intervene on the concept of recognition self-respect. My idea of self-respect need not rely on the evaluative psychology of self-esteem, which pull us in different directions, so my reflections here regarding the role reversal objection have to be inconclusive. Self-esteem is perhaps a secondary, rather than primary, consideration when it comes to analysis of self-authorization for this reason. In the next section, I will look instead to social recognition to see whether it will give us more satisfactory answers.

### **5.8 Social recognition**

Finally, I will try to establish asymmetry by considering the dimension of social recognition. So far, I took it to be possible to establish asymmetry by casting the MM as having an excess of self-respect, and the CR as having a deficiency, with their psychological evaluative states being secondary considerations. But discussion about moral excess or deficiency of self-respect would be impossible without a wider social institution or context within which such claims can be made coherent. There is a sense in which self-authorization may be validated or strengthened through social recognition. I believe this is exactly what has

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<sup>415</sup> Diane Goldstein and Alan Rosenbaum, ‘An Evaluation of the Self-Esteem of Maritally Violent Men’, *Family Relations*, 34 (1985), 425-428 (p. 426).

occurred in the MM's case. If this is true, then I will be able to vouch for why the MM has a preternatural excess of self-respect, and why the CR seem deficient in it. The dimension of social recognition will be able to tell us more about what is going on in the social environment that could make these disparities possible.

To preface my analysis, I will overview several notions of power. Then I consider Katharine Jenkins' concept of ontic injustice as a way to glean the asymmetry. The reason I employ Jenkins' framework is because I believe her theory to serve as a helpful lens by which to bring attention to relevant features like power, recognition, and justice related issues that pull our cases in different directions.

First, power. According to John Searle, the core idea of "power concerning the power of some people over others...is that it involves the ability of an agent of power to get subjects to do what the agent wants them to do whether the subjects want to do so or not"<sup>416</sup>. But it may be protested that the MM does not have power except brute force, and in any case that it isn't clear how the power he does have is related to autonomy. While I will not have room to explore the many existing accounts of power, I will now explore a few concepts that I find particularly interesting for my analysis: *deontic* power and *telic* power.

Some of how we get people to do things involves cases in which the power "consists of reasons for action"<sup>417</sup>, rather than, say, brute force. Much of power takes place in a deontic grammar. For instance, deontic vocabulary can be used to identify political powers, e.g. 'the California governor has the right to veto legislation'. When we collectively accept *status functions*<sup>418</sup> taking place in society, we accept that there are "obligations, rights, responsibilities, duties, entitlements, authorizations, permissions, requirements..."<sup>419</sup>. These count as deontic powers.

What about telic power? According to Åsa Andersson, telic power is based on telic normativity, which concerns the ideal standards against which we measure others and

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<sup>416</sup> John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 147.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>418</sup> John R. Searle, 'Social Ontology: Some basic principles', *Anthropological Theory*, 6 (2006), 12-29 (p. 18).

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

ourselves *qua* our social identities. A phrase like, ‘a good woman knows how to run a household’ is one example of a telic norm. Such standards are normative both in the sense of “being laden with ideas of value and attitudes of approval and disapproval, but also as reasons for action”<sup>420</sup>. The role of being a woman is not only made up of rules that specify rights and obligations, but also in terms of purposes, like what it means to live up to an ideal of womanhood. The idea of deontic power does not quite capture this. For example, being ineligible to vote because one is a woman would count as a lack of deontic power, but feeling that one should not ride a bicycle because it would be ‘unladylike’ would be a case of “being subject to the force of a telic norm”<sup>421</sup>. This idea of telic normativity can “exert a significant influence on people’s actions and modes of living”<sup>422</sup>, as it delineates different ideas about what is appropriate for men and women to do.

Could this clue us into what might be going on in the MM’s case? Suppose that individuals *regardless* of gender have a negative deontic power in their equal legal obligation not to engage in abusive behaviour with others. Is it still possible to view the MM as having more power? I believe so: for one, the idea of a telic normativity, to the extent that the ‘ideal’ against which a man is socially measured involves hypermasculine and aggressive qualities, may mean that even if the MM has no right to harm others, the telic norms that operate in his social environment may sanction such actions, giving MM telic power to that extent. It was mentioned earlier that the MM was ‘egged on’ by his friends to display his machismo sensibilities. It seems true that gaining social appraisal is structurally very close to acquiring an implicit kind of socially sanctioned *moral* permission. If the MM accepts and acts on social norms, it seems he may equivocate them as morally acceptable ones, because the idea of a background telic and deontic context at play mean that both positive appraisal and moral recognition is *available* to the MM. But even if, say, the MM’s personal reasons for adopting the norms were because he would prefer to avoid social ostracization, rather than because he is proud to be macho, there is much more than his individual perspective at play, because the space of appraisal and recognition is drawn up by what is going on in the social environment.

In the context of our discussion, the MM’s negative deontic power is made ineffective at the macro-level – even though his conduct is not legally permissible, it is tolerated or

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<sup>420</sup> Katharine Rhiannon Clare Jenkins, ‘Ontic Injustice’ (University of Sheffield, 2016), p. 62

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.



treated in exceptional ways. By exceptional, I mean that the penalties accorded to crimes of that nature have not actually applied to the MM. The fact that he is ‘admired’ for his manliness and isn’t so much as chided for his treatment toward women attests to the possibility that he has substantive deontic power, contrary to the appearance that he does not. The reason why the MM’s deplorable moral inflation of his own authority actually *sticks* is because the social environment does in fact tolerate the conventions on which the MM’s conduct is based. This licentiousness accords the MM with a greater level of self-authorization and social recognition.

There is also a possibility that *opaque* deontic powers have an effect on self-authorization. Jenkins says, as an example, the end to the law of marital rape exemption (which prevented non-consensual sex within marriage from being considered a crime) in 1991 in England and Wales has not brought about adequate change for women. At the ‘micro-level’, it appears as though wives deontic power because the law codifies it. However, due to “the complex interaction of telic norms, socialized practice, institutional set-ups, and individual intentionality”<sup>423</sup>, women may not in practice have the deontic power to refuse their husbands sex at a ‘macro-level’.

Such macro-level considerations might include rape myths. Jenkins cites a study that considered rape myth acceptance among women had been raped; it was found that women who had been raped in a way that corresponded to the myth and who accepted the myth were less likely than others to ‘acknowledge’ the rape (that is, they report experiences that match the legal definition of rape but hesitate to call it rape). For example, a woman who accepts the myth that dressing in a sexually provocative fashion is a form of consent, and whose own experience of rape matched this myth, would be less likely to accept that her experience was ‘real’ rape. This, along with other beliefs and factors which lead to under-reporting, victim-blaming, low conviction rate, and so on, maintain the “state of affairs in which women are unable to enforce their claim to control sexual access to their own bodies”<sup>424</sup>. Jenkins says that this can help explain the “paradoxical logics...in social discourses surrounding rape”<sup>425</sup>. So even if rape is universally treated as a very bad thing, the rape of women is

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

“systematically denied, ignored, and excused”<sup>426</sup> precisely because these events are often not recognized as rape (*‘rape rape’*), and because women have ‘subperson’ status.

Could it be that our CR case is an instance of an opaque lack of deontic power? It seems plausible. Luker’s study subjects appear to have full access to contraception – that is, CRs are entitled to contraception, and as such have deontic power. However, this breaks down at the opaque macro level because of the background features (telic norms, social pressures, etc.) that prescribe and value conduct contrary to full use of decision-making power in the realm of contraception. We might say, then, that the ‘positive’ deontic grammar that characterizes the MM’s conduct can be a constituent aspect of his self-authorization and social recognition, as he has powers in an exceptional sense. He is in effect ‘above’ the law. The ‘negative’ deontic grammar in force for the CRs mean that her deontic powers are rendered inefficacious, so the laws that are in place which are meant to constitute *her* deontic powers are not properly taken up.

I hope it is now clear how both transparent and opaque power structures in one’s social background scaffold self-authorization in a number of ways. I will now explain how ontic injustice might be viewed as a type of deficiency of social recognition that an individual might suffer. According to Jenkins, ontic injustice “consists of an individual being constructed as a member of an institutional category where this involves wrongful deprivation of deontic powers”<sup>427</sup>. This can involve either or both *transactional* and *structural* failures of recognition respect. Transactional recognition respect suggests that recognition occurs via *individual* attitudes that one can have toward another. But since Jenkins’ view is that it is possible for deontic powers to be lacking without people being explicitly aware of it, we need to think about *structural* recognition as well. Structural failures of recognition respect happen when a structure (e.g. institution) is “insensitive and unresponsive to morally relevant features of some person or group of people”<sup>428</sup>. Ontic injustice can involve transactional, structural, or a mix of the two aspects of recognition failure. I think this distinction is a useful expansion of the idea of recognition respect, and one that fits in well with my social recognition view.

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

In order for ontic injustice to take place, the category needs to be ‘institutional’ – that is, a category “characterized by the allocation of deontic powers”<sup>429</sup>. And the deontic powers that characterize membership in the institutional category must be themselves wrongful, for it to count as ontic injustice; membership in the category as a “consequence or a precondition of injustice”<sup>430</sup> is not sufficient. Jenkins says that women and persons of colour, in virtue of being ascribed a member of a group “socially defined as having a lesser moral standing than they in fact do”<sup>431</sup>, are deprived of a number of deontic powers like earning a fair wage or bodily autonomy. The point is that the injustice isn’t located only in being actually raped, underpaid, and so on; it also consists in being “*made into the sort of person to whom these things are permitted to happen*”<sup>432</sup>.

Here, Miranda Fricker’s notions of testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice might be useful, as well as Rebecca Kukla’s idea of discursive injustice. *Testimonial injustice* is when a prejudice keeps a hearer from granting due credibility to a speaker (e.g. police don’t believe you because you are black)<sup>433</sup>, *hermeneutic injustice* when “a gap in collective interpretive resources”<sup>434</sup> disadvantages one from making sense of their social experiences (e.g. suffering sexual harassment in a culture that lacks the concept), and *discursive injustice* is the ‘systematic inability’ members of disadvantaged social groups face in producing speech acts of the relevant performative force (speech acts might be misrecognized or fail to be recognized *as* the intended speech act)<sup>435</sup>. These are just some of the specific ways that agents might struggle to be properly recognized in different realms of being social in the world, and I think they can fit under Jenkins’ broader category of ontic injustice.

While Jenkins’ discussion of ontic injustice does not directly refer to autonomy, I think it gives us the resources to articulate why the case of the MM and CR are asymmetrical with respect to social recognition. By thinking through types of power that are prescribed and recognized for different social identities, we were able to extract several lines of thought that

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>433</sup> Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Rebecca Kukla, ‘Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice’, *Hypatia*, 29 (2014), 440-457 (p. 445)

point to asymmetry between the cases: it looks like MM is more advantaged with respect to his deontic powers, and also that he does not suffer ‘ontic injustice’. This last dimension of social recognition, then, seems to be the missing factor that has now helped us explain why the second feminist intuition persists even if we imagine that the agents under analysis are equivalent with respect to normative competence as well as their psychological self-regarding states.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

Natalie Stoljar’s feminist intuition set an important challenge to procedural accounts of autonomy in its advocacy of a framework that can substantively pick out the wrong of oppression for autonomy. I argued, however, that her response to the feminist intuition with a normative competence account failed to account for a second feminist intuition – the question of how to distinguish asymmetries of autonomy between ‘oppressors’ and those under oppression. To create this contrast, I adopted Stoljar’s example of contraceptive risk-takers, and added another case – the unregenerate macho male – adapted from Diana Meyers. To argue against the view that the two cases are symmetrical with respect to autonomy, I applied my multidimensional view of autonomy.

My view was that asymmetry could be established mainly by looking at the dimensions of self-authorization and social recognition, which are elements that constitute parts of my multidimensional view. For recognition self-respect, I established asymmetry by casting the cases in oppositional ways: the MM has an excess of self-respect, and the CR a deficiency. For evaluative self-respect, I showed that asymmetry could not be conclusively established. However, in the section on social recognition, I showed that we could get an overall determination that rules in favour of the MM as having more autonomy, by showing that the MM is advantaged for the dimension of social recognition due to his deontic powers. My multidimensional approach allowed this to be established, successfully countering the symmetrical view on which Stoljar’s account was stuck. Thus, my nuanced view has a distinct advantage over Stoljar’s feminist account in that it is able to explain both her feminist intuition as well as my ‘second’ feminist intuition.

## 6

### Dialogical autonomy

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss why it is crucial that my multidimensional account of autonomy include the element of dialogical answerability, or self-responsibility. My view is that including self-responsibility as an element of autonomy is key to mitigating potential worries that might otherwise arise in the way I've conceptualized autonomy.

I begin the chapter by stating that Westlund's dialogical framework is one that contains the resources around which I come to the view that self-responsibility is essential as a dimension of autonomy that can both *constitute* autonomy at the individual level and help us *ascribe* it to agents.

Next, I detail why I am motivated to adopt the dialogical framework as a way to fill in my own account of autonomy. Following a comparative analysis of my own account and Westlund's dialogical account, it will become apparent that the dialogical framework on its own is subject to worries that insights from my own view can remedy. As it stands, Westlund's account unnecessarily problematizes character traits that do not exhibit a lack of autonomy. Furthermore, I argue that Westlund's emphasis on dialogical answerability is too perfectionistic. Next, her account cannot accommodate the possibility that *resisting* responsiveness need not be detrimental to autonomy. Finally, her framework tends to be *overinclusive* of autonomy in cases of oppression. Thus I demonstrate that the issues tied to the dialogical framework can be resolved by subsuming self-responsibility into my own multidimensional view.

#### 6.2 Deference and Autonomy

Westlund considers the potentially devastating effect of self-abnegating deference on personal autonomy. She brings up the example of the Angel in the House (Virginia Woolf's description of the ideal Victorian woman), who "...was so constituted that she never had a mind or wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of

others”<sup>436</sup>. Westlund wonders if this character, suffers a ‘pathology of agency’ – could such a character, who wants her will to be subordinate to others, be said to be properly self-governing and thereby autonomous? To clarify, that what Westlund means by self-governance involves both ruling out unwelcome alien influences (in the form of coercion, manipulation, and so forth) and also of asking whether “...the acts and choices in question are such as to be coherently expressive of, attributable to, or authorized by the agent, as a distinct or determinate self”<sup>437</sup>. She acknowledges that plenty of well-known accounts explore this second kind of question, such as Frankfurt’s hierarchical model of autonomy, wherein the desire for which one acts is *attributable* to an agent depending on whether the agent identifies with and wholeheartedly endorses the desire. However, she says that accounts of identification do not help us diagnose any ‘pathology of agency’ in the Angel’s self-abnegating deference<sup>438</sup>. Woolf’s Angel could be characterized as wholeheartedly endorsing her self-abnegating deference, in line with the Frankfurtian conditions for autonomy. And yet, the very fact that she endorses her own deference seems to raise alarm about her autonomous status. Westlund says that what unsettles us about this case is “the profound difficulty we encounter in attempting to engage the agent in justificatory dialogue”<sup>439</sup>. The disposition to hold oneself answerable to critical perspectives outside one’s own is a crucial component of autonomy in Westlund frameworks. She uses the terms ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘responsibility for self’ to refer to the same idea<sup>440</sup>.

However, we still need to get clear on what exactly it is that counts as the problematic sort of deference (self-abnegating deference). The well-known example of the Deferential Wife, from Thomas Hill Jr.’s paper ‘Servility and Self-Respect’, is referenced as the type of character who embodies this problematic sort of deference. The Deferential Wife (DW for short), defers virtually all her decisions to her husband. In Hill’s example, the DW is

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<sup>436</sup> Virginia Woolf. ‘Professions for Women’. *Women and Writing*, ed. By Michele Barrett. (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1979), pp. 57-63, p. 58.

<sup>437</sup> Andrea C. Westlund, ‘Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?’, *The Philosophical Review*, 112 (2003), 483-523 (p. 484).

<sup>438</sup> In her paper, Westlund explains at some length why she finds that Harry Frankfurt’s and Michael Bratman’s identificationist models of autonomy are stumped to explain the case of Woolf’s Angel. Because Westlund herself has extensively explored and justified why these models are inadequate to capture the intuition of non-autonomy in the Angel’s case, I bracket this debate in my own paper. See section 2 of Andrea C. Westlund, ‘Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?’, *The Philosophical Review*, 112 (2003), 488-491.

<sup>439</sup> Westlund, ‘Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?’, p. 484.

<sup>440</sup> The next section, ‘Responsibility for Self’, will explain this idea in greater detail.

described as happy with the way things are and loving towards her husband, yet as tending “not to form her own interests, values, and ideals”<sup>441</sup>. In Westlund’s view, the DW, like Woolf’s angel, exhibits self-abnegating deference. Self-abnegating deference, Westlund says, can be distinguished from the less problematic forms of deference, such as deference motivated by prudence<sup>442</sup>, and deference to experts<sup>443</sup>, which do not seem like self-effacing types of deference.

To illustrate when deference *is* problematic, Westlund presents a scenario in which a character like the DW is questioned by a friend on her decision to follow her husband’s wishes and move away so he can take up a new job. In this scenario, a friend of the DW asks her why she was so ‘quick’ to agree to the move. The DW answers that she will be perfectly fine and that it’s important to her husband that they make this move. To this response, the friend demurs, asking the DW why she hasn’t considered her *own* interests and preferences more thoroughly. At this point, the DW “casts about for things to say”<sup>444</sup> and finally says that she just wants her husband to “have what he wants; that’s all”<sup>445</sup>.

This is a case of what Westlund calls ‘deep deference’ – a problematic sort of deference in which the agents’ endorsements have no non-deferential basis. The issue, for Westlund, is that the DW abnegates herself as a “distinct and separate evaluator or practical reasons”<sup>446</sup>.

### 6.3 Responsibility for Self

So what is the connection of self-responsibility as dialogical answerability to autonomy, and why does deep deference undercut it? Westlund argues that deep deference undermines the disposition to take responsibility for self “by blocking readiness to engage in justificatory dialogue with (real or imagined) critical interlocutors”<sup>447</sup>. In her view, this

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<sup>441</sup> Thomas E Hill Jr., ‘Servility and Self-Respect’, *The Monist*, 57 (1973), 87-104 (p. 88).

<sup>442</sup> Hill’s example of a DW who ‘tolerates’ an abusive husband for her own survival, or to collect ‘stories for her book against marriage’ (see Hill, ‘Servility and Self-Respect’, p.95) might count as deference motivated by prudence. On Hill’s account servility with this sort of motivation is not true servility (the problematic kind). On Westlund’s account, similarly, this scenario would not count as *deep* deference.

<sup>443</sup> Deference to experts, where appropriate, also counts as benign.

<sup>444</sup> Westlund, ‘Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?’, p. 487.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

failure of ready responsiveness to critical interlocutors is what flags the DW as lacking a mind of her own<sup>448</sup>.

Westlund says that when we hold someone *responsible* for their decisions, we are at the same time holding her *accountable* for them. This involves more than “...making her the target of one’s praise or blame...it involves subjecting the person to a demand for a response or *answer* to one’s charges”<sup>449</sup>. She says that being held responsible for one’s conduct is to be faced with “a challenge that normally calls for some form of discursive response – a justification, exculpating explanation, or acknowledgement of the wrong done”<sup>450</sup>.

Now it is not enough, on Westlund’s account, that one have a *potential* for this sort of responsiveness, yet fail to hold oneself answerable. It may be that a person is unmoved by the notion that they ‘owe’ an answer to anyone. Yet being a self-responsible person not only involves an understanding of responsiveness, but a disposition to hold *oneself* to the standard of answerability. This means one ought to expect oneself to ‘respond appropriately to criticism’ and experience answerability not simply as an external expectation placed on one, but as an expectation issuing from oneself<sup>451</sup>.

Now having this self-responsibility would mean that one actually needs to *care* about the challenges posed by external critics, and supply an answer that “meets intersubjectively shareable standards of acceptability”<sup>452</sup>. This means that saying only what one believes will get one off the hook will not reflect the kind of integrity that a self-responsible person ought to have. The self-responsible person would feel uncomfortable at the notion of taking the easy way out by giving in to “the temptation to brush off unwelcome or difficult challenges”<sup>453</sup>, and this guilt would be indicative of a type of moral maturity which would be lacking in someone who has “the skills required to formulate answers to objections without yet conceiving herself as answerable”<sup>454</sup>. Furthermore, self-responsibility isn’t just about

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<sup>448</sup> That is, it is the disposition to hold oneself answerable to external critical perspectives that anchors an attributable, determinate self. Rather than looking to hierarchical accounts to determine who the true self of the agent is, Westlund’s view is that having a mind of one’s own is about having a disposition to respond to external perspectives.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 495-496.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 496-497.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.



waiting to be challenged before subjecting her action guiding commitments to self-responsible accountability. Whether it is through actual conversation, or in an “intrapersonal version of critical dialogue”<sup>455</sup>, the disposition to self-reflect critically must take on a dialogical form<sup>456</sup>. Without this kind of self-orientation, the agent would fail to be “her own representative”<sup>457</sup>.

#### **6.4 Dialogical autonomy and the multidimensional view**

In this section I explain why I am motivated to subsume this notion of self-responsibility into my own account of autonomy. Recall that in previous chapters I outlined my account of autonomy as being comprised of distinct but interrelated elements: self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and social recognition. Self-responsibility is one of the facets of self-authorization that is explicitly interpersonal. It is the element that is expressed as and when the agent holds oneself accountable to others through dialogical exchange. The dialogical conception of self-responsibility is unique in that it specifically calls for the agent to take account of themselves and their decisions in engagement with, and as a response to, the people around them.

##### **6.4.1 The problem of the epistemic gap**

One of my motivations for subsuming self-responsibility in my account of autonomy is that it is a useful epistemic tool that reveal insights into the personal circumstances of the agent’s case. This would help bridge an epistemic gap that might otherwise affect my account, and by extension, would help us combat issues related to perfectionism. I explain this stance in this section.

The epistemic gap refers to the lack of epistemic access we have to an agent’s underlying decision-making background. Why should this concern us in the context of autonomy? First off, it raises a general question about the legitimacy of ascribing autonomy in the first place and how we can get it ‘right’ when there are gaps in our knowledge about the agent. The desirability of granting autonomy to the agent gives us reason to try in earnest to fill the epistemic gap as good practice – the more evidence we find that attest to the agent’s autonomy, the better. Of course, this endeavour may lead us to find evidence that provides

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

grounds to treat the agent's decisions as *non*-autonomous as well, but this is not an undesirable outcome: it means that we have the option to raise scepticism over an agent's autonomy where appropriate. Either way, closing the gap means making a philosophically thorough effort to consider the different ways a person may or may not be autonomous. Engaging with the agent's own perspective seems to be an intuitive way to enhance our epistemic access to their circumstances.

Next, this epistemic gap is something that should be of particular interest to feminists. Many feminist academic discussions about women's choices hinge on the question of them being autonomous, especially in feminist critiques of certain practices, or in feminist campaigns for social change. For example, feminist debates about sex work are often couched in terms of oppression and lack of workers' autonomy. There is a tension between some feminists and sex workers who feel their work is looked down upon by some feminists. Though liberal feminists might argue that workers have a right to offer sexual services in exchange for money or other goods, because of bodily autonomy, radical feminists would say that sex trade is endemic of violence against women<sup>458</sup>. Against the more damning assumptions, sex workers may "[resent] the assumption that their work was necessarily demeaning and never freely chosen"<sup>459</sup>. In thinking through these complex and controversial issues, taking into account agents' own perspective seems like the most obvious and sensible step. There are, I believe, legitimate questions and concerns that are of feminist interest that ought to invoke or call for the responses of agents who are made target of the discussion. It seems a matter of fairness in feminist social critique that we include the voices of those whose autonomy is called into question. To the extent that an epistemic gap plays a part in incorrect determinations of autonomy, it is important that the gulf in knowledge is lessened. Notwithstanding the fact that personal testimony may reflect distorted or skewed points of view, it seems at the very least equally plausible that opportunity for dialogical responsiveness would serve as an exercise by which agents are able to share, express, justify, and defend their choices from their own point of view.

#### **6.4.2 Self-responsibility and the epistemic gap**

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<sup>458</sup> Kimberly Lux, 'Work, Violence, or Both? Framing the Sex Trade and Setting an Agenda for Justice', *Advocates Forum* (2009) <<https://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/work-violence-or-both-framing-sex-trade-and-setting-agenda-justice>> [accessed 01 July 2018]

<sup>459</sup> Christine Overall, 'What's Wrong with Prostitution? Evaluating Sex Work', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 17 (1992), 705-724 (p. 705).

Let us consider how this gap might be narrowed with the help of a dialogical account. I'll draw on some work by Milton C. Regan Jr., which I find congenial to Westlund's framework. Take Regan Jr.'s example about the complications we face in ascribing autonomy when we re-construct different narratives: "Consider women who accept traditional gender roles because of their understanding of the demands of biology or religion. ... Research indicates that many such women believe that biology represents "a natural order that should really be allowed to prevail""<sup>460</sup>. Now we imagine that for these women, the 'natural order' underlies the belief that men and women are inherently different, with specific roles to play, and that reproductive processes are not something over which we *should* gain complete control. So for those who identify as pro-life activists, hesitation to interfere with the 'natural' biological order is reinforced by religious beliefs, and these women might see it as a hubris that people want to intervene with pregnancy just because it happened when it was not convenient for them.

What do we make of this? Are such women acting autonomously? There is another way to interpret this story. Faye Ginsburg, for instance, suggests that pro-life women do not 'passively acquiesce' to biological difference, but rather engage in active affirmation of their biological sex, which they regard as the basis for their female identity. She says pro-life women "often describe the trajectory of their lives as a process of overcoming initial ambivalence about or even resistance to pregnancy, which culminates in the willing embrace of one's female nature... For some women, early identification with liberal feminism contributed to reluctance to accept their role. Coming to accept that role thus required them to take a critical perspective toward an initial commitment"<sup>461</sup>. For these pro-life women, feminine identity is sought and gained, not something they simply find themselves reduced to. Rather than seeing themselves as perpetuating a system of 'male privilege', they see it more as "seeking to preserve an intricate set of social relationships that valorize women by promoting feminine values of nurture and responsibility..."<sup>462</sup> Furthermore, linking sex to pregnancy and marriage limits the tendency to regard women as sex objects and, serves as "the linchpin for the material security of women with dependents"<sup>463</sup>. Legal access to abortion is seen as a threat to this security, and seen as taking pressure off the men to step up

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<sup>460</sup> Milton C. Regan Jr., 'Getting Our Stories Straight: Narrative Autonomy and Feminist Commitments', *Indiana Law Journal*, 72 (1997), 449-457 (p. 454).

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 455.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

to their financial and emotional responsibilities for the outcomes they've brought about through sex. This balance of binary responsibility between men and women would effectively be weakened by the individualistic view of persons as actors who do as they will and act for their own interests.

I believe an account like Westlund's can accommodate the fascinating differences that emerge in these two perspectives on pro-life women in their choices. A woman who, when questioned as to why they accepted traditional gender roles, responded (for instance) to the effect that they seek to "preserve an intricate set of social relationships that valorize women by promoting feminine values of nurture and responsibility"<sup>464</sup>, would count on the dialogical account as manifesting a kind of answerability that is not in itself deferential. Now whether we agree or not that such an agent has the *right* idea about what it means to vouch for womanhood, is a different question – the value of Westlund's account would seem to be that, in a case like this, the fact that the agent is ready to answer to external critique at all is quite enough to indicate their autonomy.

Coming to know of these perspectives is important for filling in the epistemic gap. Exchanging dialogue and conversation humanizes and personalizes the process of ascribing autonomy, and from a feminist perspective, allows us to combat presumptuous ascriptions over women's personal views and choices. We are not removed from the agents we consider, but must also be responsive to them and be able to exchange feedback as we gain 'inside' knowledge. In this way, my view is that the dialogical account can enhance how we fill in the blanks when it comes to considering the normative background against which the agent makes decisions, and the reasons and values they employ making those decisions. It gives us a way to make a fuller and more rich determination about the agent's autonomy. This seems especially important since it is all too easy to assume from the outside wrong attributions of autonomy based on the appearance of 'deference' associated with agents under oppression.

### **6.5 The threat of perfectionism – problems with Westlund's account**

So far, self-responsibility helps add a dimension to my account that personalizes determinations of autonomy. A worry about perfectionism arises, however. Though trying to fill the epistemic gap is supposed to help us make a fair judgment of any agent's autonomy, it seems that a cost of getting into that level of detail might make the process of discerning

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

autonomy too cumbersome – both from the perspective of the agent in question and the outsiders who engage them in dialogue. We might be concerned that requiring self-responsibility is quite *demanding* on the agent – perhaps it is not always reasonable to encroach on the individual to justify their position and why they’ve decided to do so-and-so. We might also worry that as a practical account of autonomy, one that involves self-responsibility is *unrealistic*. After all, there are plenty of ways to ascribe and determine someone’s autonomy without having to know a person fully or to get into deep conversation with them. Furthermore, asking agents to take stock of their choices through dialogical exchange may not benefit all agents – it would enhance determinations of autonomy of individuals who are articulate and congenial to exchange, but may not work so well as a tool to secure epistemic access in cases where agents are *not* so inclined, making the process *underinclusive*. However, as I will argue, the threat of perfectionism is not an issue on my multidimensional account, since I do not take a *sole* focus on self-responsibility.

Now this is where I differentiate my account from Westlund’s. I believe that self-responsibility, subsumed as part of my multidimensional account of autonomy, would allow us to narrow the epistemic gap without being subject to the problems of perfectionism. Westlund’s account on its own, however, fails to do this. Westlund’s account as it stands is limited overall in its potential to tackle the threat of perfectionism. This is, first, due to the fact her account inappropriately problematizes ordinary traits of character as antithetical to autonomy. Second, the account imports an overly idealized view of dialogical skills under a guise of content-neutrality. Third, it fails to accommodate the intuition that resisting dialogical answerability may be conducive for autonomy in some cases. Lastly, her account of autonomy is *overinclusive* in the cases that *do* have cause to be treated as cases of non-autonomy, thus failing to exercise enough scepticism where it is in fact appropriate to do so.

### **6.5.1 The Entrenched Eccentric**

Let us consider first a positive feature of the dialogical account. A positive feature of the dialogical account, *prima facie*, is a built-in content-neutrality. Because the focus is not on the content of the answers that an agent offers, but rather her disposition to take up external feedback, the dialogical account should in theory not place a value-laden expectations and demands on the agent’s choices. However, there is a way in which Westlund’s account problematizes the wrong sort of character traits and inadvertently turns

out to idealize responsiveness itself in a way that is intuitively unrealistic for most ordinary agents to meet.

That the dialogical account is too strict in ordinary cases becomes clear in her analysis of a character who is inclined to be brashly sarcastic and dismissive of others. Westlund calls this character the Entrenched Eccentric (EE). She says that this character "...is not open to justificatory dialogue with respect to his sarcasm at all. All one receives...is more of the same sarcastic dismissal. "That's just the way I am," he finally retorts to those who persist, "and if so-and-so can't deal with it, that's his problem.""<sup>465</sup> While *others* may hold him responsible for his insensitivity, the EE doesn't take responsibility for it himself.

In her paper originally, presentation of this character was meant to refute a possible critique of her account, namely that characters such as the Deferential Wife (DW) are not the only sort who are "impervious to attempts to engage them in justificatory dialogue"<sup>466</sup>, and that there are rather other characters, who do *not* seem to intuitively lack in autonomy, who exhibit the same unresponsiveness. Her analysis of the EE character, who is alike the DW character in dialogical unresponsiveness, was meant to show that, intuitions notwithstanding, someone who is unresponsive to external critique due to self-important sarcasm may well exhibit as much of a failure in autonomy as someone like the DW, who is unresponsive due to deep deference.

The dilemma is that if we do find EE to be autonomous despite their lack of self-answerability, it seems like the failure of the DW to be autonomous must be due to some other feature of the case yet undiscerned by the dialogical account. She says, however, that it may be difficult to think of the EE as lacking in responsiveness. For instance, the fact that the EE might "defend his sarcasm as a harmless idiosyncrasy, insisting that those who are offended must be taking themselves too serious"<sup>467</sup> seems to exhibit responsiveness. He satisfies answerability in a way that isn't itself deferential: "He does not fail to appreciate what his interlocutor asks of him, but takes up the challenge, showing signs of self-responsibility that sets him apart from the DW..."<sup>468</sup>. This is an unsatisfactory explanation of

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<sup>465</sup> Westlund, 'Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?', p. 509.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p. 510.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

the difference, however; in this detailed case it is already clear that self-answerability is not consistent between DW and EE, since EE's self-answerability is given more credit. Westlund could have said the same thing about a *modified* version of the DW<sup>469</sup>. The more puzzling question is whether the EE still turns out to be more autonomous than the DW whilst being *just as* unresponsive as the DW. Here, Westlund concedes the point. She says if the EE really did turn out to be indifferent towards the 'normative weight' of their interlocutor's challenges, "we no longer have reason to resist the conclusion that he and DW suffer a like impairment of agency"<sup>470</sup>.

In my view, it is a mistake to determine that the DW and EE are equally non-autonomous due to their failure in dialogical responsiveness. Westlund's concession that the EE is unresponsive highlights a flaw with her account. On Westlund's account, ordinary character traits like stubbornness and independence of mind, could potentially be threats to autonomy to the extent that such dispositions limit one's self-answerability. That "that's just the way I am" seemingly cannot constitute a proper defence by the EE seems to suggest that responsiveness itself must take on a form that is not only explicitly non-deferential, but *also* be of a kind that substantively idealizes open dialogical responsiveness. Failures in answerability due to deep deference, like in the case of the DW, makes intuitive sense as failures of autonomy because it is a scenario where one's responsiveness or ability to hold oneself accountable is literally usurped or outweighed by another person's authority. In the EE's case, the individual is unresponsive on their *own* authority, so to speak, rather than *because* of anyone else. This would imply, peculiarly, that the agent fails to be autonomous whenever and wherever they fail to situate themselves as active participants in dialogical exchange, regardless of the reason for this. Whilst this implication is certainly consistent with Westlund's framework, it seems counterintuitive to be committed to the claim that a lack of self-responsibility because of deference and a lack of self-responsibility due to a stubborn personality are *equivalent* failures of autonomy.

I believe a simpler explanation can be made. On my multidimensional account of autonomy, there isn't a clear sense in which a character like the EE is lacking in self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and no normative background that should lead us to suspect something may have gone awry by way of social recognition. Thus, even if

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<sup>469</sup> More on this in a later section, 'The Anti-Feminist'

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

the EE fails to properly exhibit one dimension of autonomy – that of self-responsibility – we might make the overall judgment that the EE’s particular failure is trivial in the big picture. Of course, there *will* be cases where stubbornness, or being bitingly sarcastic, etc. might be problematic for autonomy in a significant way, just as the DW’s deference is problematic for autonomy in a significant way. Yet it seems quite a stretch to say off the bat that the EE’s unresponsiveness constitutes much of an erosion of their autonomy, because the unresponsiveness of the EE, as compared with the unresponsiveness of the DW, seems to be of a *benign* kind – and this is a distinction that the dialogical account fails to make.

On my analysis, the reason why the DW’s failure of answerability seems confirm a lack of autonomy in a way that the EE’s case does not, has to do with the elements of autonomy in which she is *already disadvantaged* in some way. Of the basic elements I propounded as necessities for full autonomy, it would seem that the DW is possibly lacking in self-determination, self-authorization, and social recognition. Perhaps her tendency to defer to her husband limits her actual opportunities, the authority her husband holds makes her less self-respecting, and she is likely to be seen by others as self-abnegating. There are many possible reasons we might cite to support claims as to why various elements of her autonomy are compromised. Thus, her *unresponsiveness* offers a sort of *added* insight into her life and self-regarding attitudes that attend her situation, helping confirm what we already find suspect about her case. In the EE’s case, however, no such reason seems to crop up as *suspect* in the same way. Even though the EE is unresponsive, and fails to exhibit this element of autonomy, we don’t get the sense that this unresponsiveness accompanies failures or deprivations of other elements of autonomy.

### **6.5.2 Idealizing dialogical responsiveness**

So far, it seems that the dialogical account on its own tends to favour those who can articulate a coherent response to feedback. As we’ve seen above with the EE, one effect of this is that it problematizes character types that otherwise seem ordinary and strike us as autonomous. My multidimensional account supplied a more satisfactory explanation that balanced out the failure to exhibit self-responsibility with other ways by which we might ascribe the agent autonomy. In this part, I will discuss a worry that extends from this: Westlund’s account values justificatory dialogue too substantively. Why should we expect agents to be dialogically responsive in the first place? Westlund addresses this latter concern with an example from Ingra Schellenberg:



“[Schellenberg] describes a case, drawing from her experience as a clinical ethicist, in which a woman she calls Betty confounds her doctors by refusing potentially life-saving skin-graft surgery. Betty...simply shut down when pressed to give reasons. Betty’s refusal to engage, Schellenberg suspects, was in part due to her limited intellectual abilities. But in part, Betty’s refusal was based on something else: she seemed to reject as unreasonable the very demand that she *give* reasons for her decision. Unlike the hyper-articulate medical professionals by whom she was surrounded, Betty did not seem to value justificatory dialogue...This preference, Schellenberg reports, appeared to be consistent with a broader pattern of voluntary solitude...”<sup>471</sup>

Westlund argues here that Betty is not self-governing with respect to her decision, but is rather ‘in the grip’ of the value of independence or opposing authority figures. Betty failed to be “moved by the feeling that she owes a response to the counter-considerations raised by others”<sup>472</sup>. Still, this seems rather to propound the view that an agent cannot disengage from those holding her answerable. This idea that one must positively value dialogical responsiveness is a strong claim - and one that may not be very inclusive. As Schellenberg mentions, “the socially vulnerable may fall disproportionately into the group of those who feel threatened by justificatory dialogue”<sup>473</sup>. Westlund tries to get around this by saying that responsibility for the self does not in fact “rely on valuing any specific justificatory practice”<sup>474</sup>, like a willingness to cite reasons on demand. She says the open form of answerability does not require the agent to express their dialogical skills in a specific kind of way. Westlund insists that agents who “feel threatened by a more articulate interlocutor” might want to reflect internally where they won’t be “disempowered by an imbalance in sheer argumentative skill”<sup>475</sup>.

She also says that we are indeed in the right to feel that we do not owe any answers under ‘illegitimate’ circumstances. Dialogical answerability is not something that we are required to exercise for every single challenge levelled at us, but rather something we owe to ‘legitimate’ challenges. She says a legitimate challenge must be situated “in a way that makes

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<sup>471</sup> Andrea C. Westlund, ‘Rethinking Relational Autonomy’, *Hypatia*, 24 (2009), 26-49 (p. 38).

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., Unpublished comments by Ingra Schellenberg

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

relational sense of the intervention”<sup>476</sup>. A sense-giving relationship might be that one where one is positioned as a member of the moral community, someone’s neighbor, etc. What this means is that it must be clear “why it matters to my critic why I think and act the way I do, and it must matter to her in a way that she can reasonably expect to matter to me”<sup>477</sup>. This is a condition she calls *relational situatedness*. This condition at least clarifies the fact that part of the ‘burden’ of dialogical exchange falls *also* on the interlocutors who pose challenges. Yet the demand for reasons and answers may still place too much of a burden on agents who aren’t so inclined to engage in argument with others, even where the challenge is ‘legitimate’. This worry, Westlund says, gives rise to the condition of context-sensitivity. On this condition, a legitimate challenge must be context-sensitive with respect to the kind of response it invites and tolerates. Furthermore, Westlund says, there are alternative other ways of demonstrating that ‘one holds oneself to appropriately situated critical challenges’. Some examples are for the agent to:

“...provide a life-narrative that manifests one’s reasons...outside the realm of the conversational, an agent may give explicit or implicit signals that she intends to reflect on what has been said...or that she is attempting to repair, restructure, or terminate a relationship or practice that has come into question.”<sup>478</sup>

Thus she claims that it is possible for agents to exercise responsiveness even as they disvalue being put in a position to have to engage and cite their reasons “in the face of direct questioning”<sup>479</sup>. While her conditions of relational situatedness and context-sensitivity certainly mitigates the over-idealization of dialogical responsiveness, I am not sure that this cements the dialogical framework as a viable account of autonomy on its own. If the condition of dialogical responsiveness allows agents to in fact disengage from appropriately relationally placed interlocutors who question and challenge them, it collapses back into a state of internal critical reflectiveness. It seems that if she concedes too much by allowing that agents can be ‘internally’ responsive, it is no longer clear that her account is doing much more than what Frankfurtian hierarchical accounts do to locate autonomy. Yet if the strength of her framework was to tout the active disposition for answerability as constitutive of

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., p.40

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

autonomy, and to claim that the interpersonal nature of this dialogical exchange makes her account sufficiently ‘relational’, she underplays these features by weakening her account in response to this critique about the *overvaluation* of dialogue.

A more feasible move, I believe, would be to view self-responsibility as just one of many factors that constitute autonomy in a multidimensional account. This way, individuals who are inarticulate or resistant to outside questioning are not lumped into the non-autonomous category from the get go, and we need not concede too much to their internal critical reflections either; we can instead address their autonomy in a more holistic and multifaceted way, balancing out the expectation of responsiveness with other elements that may exhibit autonomy.

### **6.5.3 The Self-Assured**

Another issue with the stand-alone condition of dialogical responsiveness is that it fails to recognize that unresponsiveness need not be fatal to autonomy. As I mentioned above, answerability is not a complete picture of autonomy. We must consider the possibility that in some cases, *refusing* to be ‘answerable’ to external perspectives, regardless of how appropriately placed and ‘context-sensitive’, might be acceptable. Of course, Westlund touched on this matter, suggesting that it may be perfectly acceptable for someone to reject external critique, and that doing so may in itself be a manifestation of answerability. After all, answerability does not require us to *concede* to others’ feedback, but rather to be responsive to it in whatever format we choose. Yet this condition is still couched in terms of answerability: Westlund only makes resistance to external critique acceptable by positing that resistance can be indicative of answerability, just in a negative sense. Again, this seems like a problematic move, as it blurs the line between refusal and outright lack of answerability. I demonstrate below with an example.

Let us consider a slightly modified version of the EE: a person who is stubborn and unflinchingly Self-Assured (SA). SA is a headstrong person who is unaffected by exhortations by those around who try and counsel or provide feedback in her best interests. Let us say that SA tends to feel flighty and indecisive if she opens herself up to be moved and swayed in dialogue with others. As such, she decisively disregards other people’s efforts to engage with her in her decision-making to simplify her own decision-making process. She is certain that doing things ‘her way’ without the input of others makes her feel more confident

and clear-headed in her choices. And because she deliberately does not open herself up to dialogue, does not consult those who are close to her, and does not feel that there is a need to justify herself even before she has properly listened to external feedback from outsiders, some people who encounter SA find her ‘difficult’ to communicate with. Yet at the same time she garners admiration from those who have observed her way of life: people start to see that it’s precisely because SA does *not* compromise on her choices, waste time justifying herself to others or asking for permission and advice, nor heeding the naysayers, that she makes strides in her life.

This character does not quite fit in with Westlund’s sympathetic reading of an outwardly inarticulate character who might nevertheless be ‘responsive’ if only in the internal sense, and thereby autonomous. It seems that in this case, the issue is not that the SA’s responsiveness is in the form of private internal reflection. The SA character is deliberately and indiscriminately unresponsive; she blocks out other voices by default, and this stance is not something she is open to re-negotiating. It’s not that she is inarticulate or outmatched by more knowledgeable people in a conversation, but that she has decided not to engage at all.

In my view, the SA is even more extreme than the EE: she dismisses feedback even *before* she has assessed or listened to them. Now we might think that this character is unlikeable. We might think that she is missing out on valuable input by distancing herself from interlocutors who might help or challenge her. But do we get the intuition that she is non-autonomous? Whilst perhaps coming off in a bad way to others, and in spite of her demonstrated lack of responsiveness, it is not clear to me that she lacks autonomy. This is assuming, of course, that we have no good reason to doubt that she satisfies other autonomy dimensions.

If we agree that this particular figure is not significantly lacking in autonomy, we must account for why that is the case. My multidimensional view can rise to the challenge of explaining the autonomy of a character like this. We could say that, while self-responsibility does constitute a real part of one’s overall autonomy, that in this specific case the lack of self-responsibility is mitigated by the way that the other elements of the individual’s autonomy positively manifests for this particular person. The SA’s refusal to engage may be a positive manifestation of her autonomous competencies *for her*, thereby making it possible to conceptualize her *lack* of dialogical answerability as a feature that exhibits her determination to go about her choices unhindered. She might find dialogical exchange burdensome, time-

consuming, and unfruitful because she knows from experience that getting caught up in discussions regarding plans she has already made will make her less decisive with respect to them. So while she gives up an important aspect of her autonomy, she manages to maintain or even boost other aspects. In the absence of countervailing reasons to suspect anything is awry, it would be sensible to accept that the SA is more or less autonomous, even if not ‘fully’ autonomous. Since my own account does not positively value dialogical responsiveness just by itself, it is not fully detrimental to autonomy that one decide to refuse, reject, or disengage from their interlocutors in these specific cases.

#### **6.5.4 The Anti-Feminist**

Now we might consider, from a different angle, that it is a strength of Westlund’s account that it is possible to for the individual to rebut or stand up to external critique even when answers are demanded of them. However, even this positive feature of her account is prone to a problem. As we shall see below, the dialogical account is not stringent enough in cases where there *is* good cause to call autonomy into question.

To go back to the DW example, Westlund herself is intent to iterate that not everyone who is ‘superficially’ like the DW in the tendency to treat herself as subordinate ought to be treated uniformly non-autonomous. Westlund is on the right track with the claim that autonomy is not equivalent in all cases where the actions are similar. She asks us to consider an example of an extreme Anti-Feminist (AF). The AF thinks that women ought to demote their own interests and let their husbands make all the decisions. Unlike the DW, however, she claims that the AF gives the question of why she is deferential “a proper uptake”. She continues,

“When questioned about her deference, AF has a justification at the ready. She may place herself within a religious community whose creed she shares and whose lifestyle she values...Whatever we think of the arguments she offers, what’s important is that AF is disposed to enter into justificatory dialogue about her deference...She exercises, both inter and intra personally, a capacity for holding herself answerable to external critical perspectives on her choices and conduct.”<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> Westlund, ‘Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?’, p. 512.

Westlund's view is that we should consider the AF autonomous. She says that while we might think AF is living a life that is morally problematic and disagree with the basis of her values, what matters is that we can continue a conversation with her, and even "take her on as a political or ethical adversary"<sup>481</sup>. To this extent, we can ascribe autonomy to the AF in a way that we were unable to do with the DW. But are these characters so different? Westlund considers the possibility that we might end up in the exact same position with the AF if, say, the AF's way of justifying herself is simply a more indirect way of arriving at deep deference. If the AF's reason is that the Bible tells her to defer to her husband, it doesn't really seem that she is any less deeply deferential than the DW, even if she is more articulate. Still, for Westlund a willingness to be "engaged in potentially open-ended self-evaluative dialogue"<sup>482</sup> would exhibit the appropriate responsibility for self despite the appearance of deference.

While I've said that it's a good thing the agent's own voice counts for autonomy on Westlund's account, the dialogical account is overinclusive in cases like this. I am not convinced that the AF and DW are so different in their levels of self-responsibility. The difference between them seems superficial. Westlund hasn't made clear what is better about the AF's answer, aside from her purporting that she exhibits a greater openness to outside challenges. The effort to include the AF's slightly more sophisticated justificatory scheme as autonomy-conducive is 'inclusive' in a counterproductive way: it counts as autonomous cases that are extremely similar to the DW, without having explained the differences between the cases save for how refined they were in dialogically justifying their decisions.

On my account, it is clear that the religious Anti-Feminist occupies a different normative space than a 'Deferential Wife' with respect to social recognition: this is why they are judged differently, rather than because the AF is distinctly more articulate or less deferential. It may just be that AF's citation of *religious* reasons steers the intuition away from internalized oppression, and swings the intuition more in favour of tolerance of her beliefs. We may also think that the *way* the AF responds reveals something about her self-regarding attitudes: by being able to reaffirm and stand up to her own beliefs as reasons for her choice-making, she exhibits a kind of self-respect that the DW fails to do in her hurried deference to her husband. This, however, may be more controversial: the AF's dogged

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid., p. 513.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., p. 514.

devotion to religious norms may thwart her self-respect. These varying scenarios are possibilities on my account, since we are not particularly focused on responsiveness itself but rather on a holistic picture of the content and input of one's dimensions of autonomous decision-making.

In my view, the overinclusiveness of the purely dialogical framework has to do with Westlund's insistence that we treat autonomy as answerability, which itself is characterized as a "formal relation, constituted by a disposition to respond to normative pressures on one's commitments, not by any particular beliefs or attitudes towards oneself. When one holds oneself answerable for a self-subordinating commitment one's explicit values and beliefs about oneself may even manifest a lack of self-respect<sup>483</sup>". This passage makes obvious the cost of Westlund's vision of content-neutrality. On my own view, in which the dimension of self-authorization include both self-responsibility and self-regarding attitudes like self-respect, this neutrality is an error: in taking responsibility for oneself, it does also matter that one hold oneself with normatively acceptable self-regarding attitudes, and not just that one be able to respond to critical challenges.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

Overall, I hope to have demonstrated that self-responsibility is an important aspect of autonomy both because it partially constitutes it, and because it is a useful epistemic tool that can help us become more informed about the agent's circumstances. However, on its own the account has several issues. These include intolerance of ordinary personality traits, excessive value placed on responsiveness, failure to accommodate non autonomy-undermining reasons for resistance to responsiveness, and over-inclusivity due to content-neutrality in structurally similar cases. For each problem, I hinted that my multidimensional framework - which assesses autonomy in a more holistic way, with both internal and external components - would resolve these issues. Self-responsibility, I found, works best as part of a multidimensional frame rather than as a standalone condition of autonomy, demonstrating that combining consideration of different elements gives us a strengthened account of autonomy.

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<sup>483</sup> Westlund, 'Rethinking Relational Autonomy', p. 37.

## Social-relational autonomy

### 7.6 Introduction

In this chapter I will critically analyse Marina Oshana's social-relational account. I show that my own multidimensional view will be able to account for the benefits of Oshana's social-relational approach without inheriting some of its more problematic aspects.

Marina Oshana's social-relational account of autonomy posits that an agent's autonomy depends on their actual social standing in the world – that is, on the *de facto* control they have over their own life within their social environment. As such, her social-relational autonomy is an *externalist* framework, which she contrasts with purely *internalist* accounts on which autonomy depends purely on psychological states supposed to denote the agent's authentic self. She accepts that while the psychological conditions characteristic of internalist accounts are *necessary* for autonomy, they fail to be sufficient. The claim here is that we need to invoke external social factors for a fuller explanation of autonomy. In one sense this externalist account succeeds in the kind of content-analysis I prescribed as a feminist desideratum back in Chapter Two. Because the social-relational account can analyse oppression as a social phenomenon incompatible with *de facto* control, it can make a substantive claim about the negative relationship between oppression and autonomy, allowing us to criticize oppression. Purely internalist accounts are unable to do this because the analysis of this relationship is limited to asking whether the agent's psychological *attitudes* are compatible with the oppressive norms that affect them, and not whether they are actually oppressed. To demonstrate the explanatory potential of her account, Oshana posits that four case studies – voluntary slavery, the subservient woman, the conscientious objector, and the monk – are inadequately explained by purely internalist accounts, but sufficiently explained with a social-relational account.

While I will agree with Oshana's critical insight that purely internalist views tend to be myopic with respect to the issue of oppression and its relationship with autonomy, my view is that the social-relational approach invites a different but equally worrying set of problems. The problem is that the social-relational approach delivers the wrong verdicts with respect to all of the four case studies she includes. In my view, this issue stems from the fact



that Oshana's social-relational account is in practice more radically relational than she claims. Thus, her view has the effect of problematizing the relationship between autonomy and oppression without *any* leeway to consider expressions of autonomy under oppression, and to the exclusion of less pernicious curtailments of *de facto* control. As such, the social-relational account is too restrictive.

Ultimately, I claim that my hybrid multidimensional framework – which integrates both internal *and* external factors as constituents of autonomy – is a more viable approach due to its equitable treatment of internal and external factors. My account will be able to compete with the purely internalist accounts subject to Oshana's critiques, but also with Oshana's social-relational view.

### **7.7 Problems with purely internalist theories of autonomy**

Oshana understands autonomy as self-government. We imagine a self-governing individual as someone who is able to formulate and realize different objectives, and whose objectives come about in a voluntary and uncoerced manner. That is not to say that individual objectives must be based on a 'pure' authentic self; rather, what matters for self-government is that individual objectives can be realized in a way that allows for the agent to be the *final* authority on what happens to their life. Taken together, this implies a self-governing person is someone who has control over their choices, actions, and will. She takes this image of a self-governing agent to be intuitively appealing in that it is a picture that many accounts could accept.

Several accounts of autonomy Oshana characterizes as 'internalist interpretations' match the picture drawn above. Internalist accounts of autonomy ascribe autonomy only on the basis of "structural and/or historical character of a person's states and dispositions, and on an agent's judgments about them"<sup>484</sup>. While she finds internalist approaches important for their honing in on the relevance of the individual's psychology – including dispositional traits and temperament – for self-governance, she takes issue with some of their features. First, she finds internalist accounts limited by their focus on autonomy as a "matter of the condition of a person's psychology"<sup>485</sup>. That is, they denote autonomy with respect to individual cases of

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<sup>484</sup> Marina A. L. Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 29 (1998), 81-102 (p. 83).

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

psychological states, but cannot denote autonomy with respect to the person. She claims there is no ‘natural transition’ from a framework of autonomy that focuses purely on psychological states to a view of the autonomy of persons. The second flaw she sees with purely internalist theories is that people with the same psychological states are symmetrically autonomous or non-autonomous. Oshana claims that her external analysis explains how two persons of the same internal psychological constitutions can differ with respect to their autonomous status because of “variance in their social circumstances”<sup>486</sup>. That is, her approach can capture the intuition that autonomy is “incompatible with constraint”<sup>487</sup>, regardless of whether such constraint is self-chosen and reflects free choice.

Oshana stresses that her criticism of internalist approaches is not to do with their incompatibility with relational social factors *per se*. The problem isn’t that internalist theories do not allow for external influences to have a bearing on autonomy. Rather, the problem is that the status of autonomy is ultimately exacted by recourse to the internal focus on the agent’s preferences and other psychological states. Oshana believes that such accounts are construed on the assumption that some essential and inviolable element of the individual exists inside the individual. For Oshana, the task of unmasking the agent’s essential and true self is an improbable task, and one that fails to consider that autonomy may be determined by manner of how a person stands in relation to their social environment.

### **7.8 The social-relational account of autonomy**

To mitigate some of the shortcomings of the internalist view, Oshana’s own account implements several addenda to internalist conditions. She claims that autonomy requires four conditions that need to be satisfied to an adequate threshold degree. These conditions include *critical reflection*, *procedural independence*, *access to a relevant range of options*, and *social-relational properties*.

First, the condition of *critical reflection* requires that individuals be able to engage in psychological activity – critical reflection – of the kind that internalists take to be sufficient for autonomy. *Contra* internalism, Oshana would not find critical reflection to be sufficient for autonomy, but she does take them to be necessary. On her view, critical reflection

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

involves engaging oneself in a ‘third party’ appraisal of one’s own motivations, actions, and the environment in which these develop<sup>488</sup>. If at the conclusion of this reflection the agent identifies with their motivations, and so on, they count as authentic in the sense relevant for self-government.

Next, *procedural independence* requires that an agent not be influenced or restricted by others in ‘autonomy-constraining’ ways. In propounding procedural independence, she follows Gerald Dworkin’s view that agents must be free of influences that diminish the authenticity of the motivations identified with by their critical faculties, though Dworkin remains ‘neutral’ with regard to the kinds of influences that would be compatible with this authenticity. She diverges from Dworkin’s conception, however, in making the more substantive claim that the environment must be free of factors that curtail “psychological integrity”<sup>489</sup> and of factors that “disable the person in her relations with others”<sup>490</sup>. This means the agent’s social environment must be non-coercive as well as non-manipulative.

The condition of *access to a range of relevant options* requires the agent to have been able to access an adequate array of options in which nonautonomy is not the only available choice. What she means by ‘nonautonomy’ here are choices which would subordinate or make the individual subservient. The options should also not be “dictated by duress”<sup>491</sup>, which could include financial and emotional duress. Furthermore, these options cannot be hypothetical ones – they must be real options that a person can hope to achieve. This is because *that* individuals accept, consent to, and identify with their choices does not mean an adequate array of choices were available to them.

Finally, autonomy requires several *social-relational properties*. This means an agent situated within a society must find themselves “within a set of relations with others that enable her to pursue her goals in a context of social and psychological security”<sup>492</sup>. In order for this set of relations to hold, Oshana posits that the following must be true:

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

- a. The individual can defend oneself against (or have the means to defend oneself against) psychological or physical assault when necessary.
- b. The individual can defend oneself against (or have the means to defend oneself against) attempts to deprive one of one's civil and economic rights, as and when such attempts occur.
- c. The individual does not need to take responsibility for another person's needs, expectations, and failings unless doing so is agreed upon or reasonably expected of the individual in light of a particular function.
- d. The individual can have, and can pursue, values, interests, needs, and goals different to those who have influence and authority over them, without undue interference or risk of reprisal effective in deterring them in this pursuit.<sup>493</sup>

Although it is this fourth condition of social-relational properties that are explicitly defined as relational, the conditions of critical reflection, procedural independence, and access to a range of options appeal to “external circumstances and relations beyond the psychology of the agent”<sup>494</sup> as well. These four conditions, taken together, are sufficient to determine the autonomy of the person. What is meant by autonomy of the person is the autonomous status of the person as separate from individual occurrences of self-government. For instance, it is entirely possible for one to be an autonomous person but be thwarted from self-directed action (e.g. one might temporarily be going through a personal crisis).

## 7.9 Case Studies

Let us now consider the four case studies that Oshana believes illustrate the need for a social-relational approach. She discusses the case of the voluntary slave, the subservient woman, the conscientious objector, and the monk. On my view, her verdicts of these cases are mistaken. This is because she tends to overemphasize external conditions, which undercut the significance of psychological conditions all together. My critique of her analysis of these cases will reveal various problems with her approach, all of which I believe stem from a *radical* view of relationality.

### 7.9.1 The Voluntary Slave

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

Oshana asks us to imagine a ‘contented slave’. First, we are asked to suppose that the slave meets the psychological conditions for autonomy – that is, the slave is authentic with respect to their choices. Next, we are asked to assume that this slave voluntarily abdicates their rights, and that they were not forced to do so. Finally, we are asked to accept that this self-chosen life of slavery is consistent with the voluntary slave’s own conception of well-being.

The question we need to consider now is whether someone who willingly and knowingly pursues a life of bondage – given that such a life reflects authentic choice and satisfies a self-chosen conception of the good – is autonomous. For Oshana, the life of slavery is automatically non-autonomous. Whether someone volunteers or ‘wants’ to be a slave is irrelevant for the question of autonomous personhood. What makes the voluntary slave non-autonomous is the fact that actually *being* a slave means they have lost effective control over their lives. While a hierarchical account like Dworkin’s approach may accept this decision as autonomous, given that it satisfies the relevant psychological criteria, Oshana rejects this determination.

She reinforces her view by raising other internalist views that deny the claim that the voluntary slave’s desires are consistent with their autonomy. She says that we could get a verdict of non-autonomy for this case if we adopt an internalist view along the lines of Thomas Hill’s approach. Hill argues that a person’s consent releases others from obligation only if it is autonomously given. However, consent that results from an ‘underestimation of one’s moral status’ is not autonomously given. A slavish attitude is equivalent to an underestimation of one’s moral status, and is thereby discounted from autonomy. While this view gives us what in Oshana’s view is the right verdict – she rejects this route of explanation. Whereas Hill states that the verdict of non-autonomy issues from the fact that slavish desires are not ones characteristic of an autonomous person’s psychology, Oshana says this isn’t actually what determines the voluntary slave as non-autonomous. What makes the voluntary slave non-autonomous is that they have elected to occupy a condition incompatible with *de facto* control.

Oshana’s analysis here seems to deviate, in practice, from the theoretical blueprint of the social-relational approach. A greater parity between the different conditions of her account would not, I think, yield this sweeping verdict. She could have credited the voluntary slave

with a partial sort of autonomy by acknowledging that their critically reflected desire to be a slave should count for something, but she does not, as we have just seen – she rejects Dworkin’s view completely. But perhaps she does this for Dworkin’s hierarchical approach particularly because it is a decidedly content-neutral account. However, she rejects Hill’s more substantive internalist explanation as well, which is surprising – Hill’s view that autonomy requires that one not underestimate their moral standing seems consonant enough with Oshana’s perspective. Hill’s view yields a verdict that agrees with Oshana’s view, and can bolster the psychological side of the analysis. Furthermore, the idea of moral equity built into Hill’s account implies the existence and possibility of an equitable social structure or moral community, which again seems appealing for Oshana’s view. It is thus puzzling that she does not claim something to this effect: the reason why the voluntary slave is non-autonomous is because their slavish attitudes undermine their own moral status, *in addition to* the fact that the actual condition of being a slave constitutes a global lack of substantive external control, access to a range of relevant options, and social-relational security. This seems more plausible than claiming the agent’s attitudes have nothing whatsoever to do with the status of autonomy, which, as I’ve mentioned, is in tension with Oshana’s formal theory. It would have been possible to say on her account that the wrongness of voluntary slavery in the context of autonomy is brought about by the agent’s failure to satisfy internalist *and* externalist conditions to a satisfactory degree.

While my view is that Oshana’s verdict happens to be correct, it is for the wrong reasons. An analysis of the case with equal consideration of internalist and externalist features of her account would have given us a satisfactory verdict without being overly psychological or relational. As we saw above, this would be perfectly possible on her formal theory, and it would also have given us the right verdict with respect to the voluntary slave. Perhaps her point is a normative rather than descriptive one – a state as austere as slavery – which no doubt counts as a condition of extreme external constraint – is so pronounced in its privations that no speculation about psychological attitudes is really necessary for us to deem the case one of non-autonomy. But this focus has the effect of obscuring clarity in how her account is to be applied.

### **7.9.2 The Marine**

A different example should be able to accentuate the restrictiveness of Oshana’s practical approach. Let us consider the following case, which I borrow from John Christman:

“One could decide to join the Marine Corps, where one must give up any overriding presumption of self-government. One must be totally guided by the orders of one’s superiors, and one must, to be a good marine, identify with the desires so adopted...”<sup>495</sup>

Now Christman himself believes the Marine is autonomous. In cases like the voluntary slave, we might suspect that “certain aspects of the social and political environment of the person are the real causes of the dispositions to be such people”<sup>496</sup>. If we can rule out such considerations, it would not be appropriate to determine one non-autonomous. The Marine is one such case that bypasses this suspicion, according to Christman.

On Oshana’s account, however, the cases would be analogous with respect to autonomy. Because the Marine must give up self-government, is answerable to an authority, and so forth, it is fair to assume that the duration in which one is a Marine is one where one relinquishes the kind of external control Oshana finds necessary for self-government. In effect, it is irrelevant whether the Marine is authentic with respect to this choice. This does not seem plausible, since a Marine is different to a voluntary slave, and part of this difference seems contingent on internalist considerations, as well as considerations that only a multidimensional view as my own can account for. In the following paragraphs I will consider several possible routes of explanation.

One thing Oshana might claim is to say that the difference between the Marine and the voluntary slave consists in the Marine being able to opt out. However, this could not be what distinguishes the cases. One reason for this is that Oshana’s account does not specify how this kind of possibility would figure in to an analysis of autonomy. Suppose there is a real possibility for a ‘slave’ to escape with outside help. It is surely irrelevant for one’s autonomous status that some potential to escape the conditions of non-autonomy exist whilst the actual condition of being a slave holds. This is also true of the Marine while one *is* a marine. It may be that opting out is less costly for the Marine than it is for the slave – but again it is unclear how this is a relevant consideration on Oshana’s account.

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<sup>495</sup> John Christman, ‘Autonomy: A Defense of the Split-Level Self’, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 281-293 (p. 288).

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

Oshana is also committed to refrain from claiming that the difference lies in how the Marine and the voluntary slave are respectively *treated*. It could be that the Marine, as compared with the slave, is treated with more humanity, given time to form camaraderie with others, granted opportunities to rise in rank, and so on. While we can accept this to the extent that they turn out to be true, how much these sorts of conditions matter for securing one's autonomy is up for dispute. It is clear from Oshana's construal of the voluntary slave that welfare or happiness are not relevant factors in determining autonomy. A Marine who is treated well is thus just as non-autonomous as a slave whose desires and needs are met by an especially benevolent master, *notwithstanding* the mutual care, reciprocity, or understanding between agents of differential power. Notions of respect or benevolence are just not concepts that are effective or particularly meaningful for autonomy under circumstances of acute constraint, because it is ultimately true of the Marine that he must answer to his officer, and true of the slave that he must answer to his master.

My multidimensional view, however, will be able to account for the nuance without being overtly psychological (as the internalist accounts are), or excessively relational (as Oshana's externalism is). As outlined in Chapter Four, my multidimensional view consists of several qualitative dimensions, which include self-determination, self-governance, self-authorization, and social recognition, as well as quantitative factors. To compare the Marine and the voluntary slave, we can look for differences with respect to the various dimensions of autonomy that they fulfill or fail to fulfill. On the axis of self-determination, it looks like the voluntary slave is disadvantaged relative to the Marine because they are extremely curtailed in their freedoms and opportunities, owing to the fact that their lives are entirely at their master's discretion. For self-governance, it seems the voluntary slave and the Marine could in principle be equal: the way the examples have been contrived suggest that both their decisions are a result of uncoerced, voluntary, and authentic choice.

The dimensions of self-authorization and social recognition, I think, will potentially delineate more major differences between the voluntary slave and the Marine. It seems to me that the intuition that the Marine is at the very least more autonomous than a voluntary slave has to do with the fact that the role of the Marine is legitimated by social recognition, which makes it possible for one to be a self-respecting Marine. That is, to the extent that the United States Marine Corps recruits, trains, and champions Marines, it is a position that is valid for an agent to adopt given this normative context. Taking it for granted that the social world



itself supplies a legitimating reason that justifies the existence of the Marine Corps, the Marine does not necessarily face difficulties accounting for their life choice. Setting aside the more foundational question of whether the existence of the Marine Corps ought to be disputed, what is really relevant for our discussion is that being a Marine is approved of in ways that contrast with the condition of ‘slavery’ *tout court*. We would be hard pressed to appraise the voluntary slave as normatively authorized in their aim to become a slave – it seems uncontroversial to assume that most of us would not take such a choice to be grounded in self-respecting attitudes, or that such a choice will find much normative approval.

Furthermore, because my multidimensional account states that quantitative factors related to the temporality and pervasiveness of any decision can make a difference to the determination of autonomy, I can state clearly that the difference in global self-abnegation as compared to self-abnegation with an opt-out clause *matters*. The enduring nature of any one decision, and its pervading effect on other decisions or decision-making realms, can be flagged as considerations which it is significant to evaluate for autonomy. Thus, the quantitative differences between the Marine, who partially relinquishes decision-making authority, and the voluntary slave, who relinquishes all authority, create nuance between the two cases.

My account, then, gives us a way to acknowledge that these cases constitute personal choice which to that extent can be credited as self-governing ones, as internalist accounts do. At the same time, we are able to raise provisional points about the social background against which such choices occur in order to state why they are problematic for autonomy. Unlike Oshana’s view, however, this exploration of the agent’s social environment is not only limited to considerations about whether it constrains or controls the agent; we are able to look at the normative connotations that attach to these instances of decision-making as reasons to treat the cases differently.

### **7.9.3 The Subservient Woman**

Let us take a look now at another case presented by Oshana and see if the same issues arise. Consider the case of the subservient woman – Oshana calls her Harriet. We have no cause to suspect that she does not subject her choices to the appropriate measures of rational and critical deliberation. She finds a life of subservience satisfying, and there is nothing she values or wants more than to live it. Is Harriet autonomous? She is not, according to Oshana.

In the following paragraphs, I will show Oshana's determination to be problematic because it commits her to a perfectionism about individuals' social standing.

According to Oshana, a person's preference for subservience can serve as an indicator of that person's ability to be self-governing, but it does not indicate that the individual who has the desire is non-autonomous. She fails to be autonomous not because she *wants* to be subservient, but because she *is* subservient. As Oshana says, "Her lack of autonomy is due to her personal relations with others and to the social institutions of her society."<sup>497</sup> This suggests, again, that what it is that makes a person distinctively non-autonomous on Oshana's view has more to do with social-relational properties than any other factor. She suggests that this intuition can be 'strengthened' by assuming that Harriet's regard for others does not just exceed, but *supersedes* self-regard. She says we might assume Harriet does not view herself as anything other than an 'other-regarding caregiver' and fails to see herself as someone whose preferences and desires have value independently of the value they serve to others. However, according to Oshana, that a person respects themselves or fails to do so does not 'decide' their status as self-governing. The real source of Harriet's non-autonomy lies in her lack of *de facto* control. So it looks like Oshana raises psychological considerations more as a way to *direct* intuitions about the case, rather than as a meaningful marker of self-government. Like the slavery case, Oshana *effectively* treats her account as a purely external framework, relegating the psychological aspect as a footnote rather than a substantive part of her theory.

But we must consider whether Oshana's view does not import a perfectionistic ideal about individual social standing. It seems like she could be suggesting that only non-interventionist social relations are autonomy-conferring. This would be a plainly restrictive implication of her view. I will briefly articulate this problem with respect to culture and personality. Consider, first, the distinction between collectivistic and individualistic societies. Simply put, collectivistic cultures cultivate the needs, wishes, and desires of 'in-groups' over individuals; they value harmony, cooperation, and conformity. By contrast, individualistic cultures cultivate the needs, wishes, and desires of individuals over groups, and encourage

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<sup>497</sup> Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society', p. 90.

individuality and uniqueness<sup>498</sup>. The terms allocentrism and idiocentrism are individual personality constructs that, at the cultural level, would correspond to collectivism and individualism<sup>499</sup>. Allocentrics tend to internalize and abide with in-group norms. The motivational structure of the allocentric relates to “receptivity to others, adjustment to the needs of others and restraint of own needs and desires”<sup>500</sup>. By contrast, the idiocentric’s motivational structure is focused more on internal needs, rights, and the ability to withstand social pressures<sup>501</sup>. Part of why I mention this frame of thinking about individual dispositions is to allow for a discussion about a ‘type’ of individuals who engage in self-abnegation or self-restraint – without inheriting the implications of intuition-pumping conditions like slavery or gendered subservience.

So what would be the status of the allocentric with respect to autonomy, on Oshana’s view? It does not seem like the position of the allocentric with respect to their external condition is much different from Harriet’s condition. It makes little difference that Harriet’s subservience is due to distorted self-regarding attitudes reinforced by gender norms and that the allocentric’s self-restraining conformity to in-group values are due to a positive identification with one’s social role. The outcome in terms of external control is similar for both. But once we concede this we are unable to allow for differences in internal attitudes, values, and preferences to inform us about autonomy – we are unable to claim that how the agent individually apprehends and positions themselves in their social world *matters*.

My point here is that looking into psychological features are in fact necessary to determine autonomy without generating a blanket category of non-autonomy to which all agents whose lives are characterized by constraint are relegated. This will mean that self-conceptions do matter. It seems plausible enough to say that there is a significant difference between an individual – perhaps an idiocentric type – who would interpret other-regarding conduct as failures of self-authorization, and someone whose conformity to other-regarding

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<sup>498</sup> Matsumoto, D. and Kupperbusch, C., ‘Idiocentric and allocentric differences in emotional expression, experience, and the coherence between expression and experience.’ *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 4 (2001), 113-131

<sup>499</sup> Harry C. Triandis, Darius K.-S. Chan, Dharm P. S. Bhawuk, Sumiko Iwao & Jai B.P. Sinha, ‘Multimethod probes of allocentrism and idiocentrism’, *International Journal of Psychology*, 30(1995), 461-480

<sup>500</sup> Mahmut Alpertunga Kara, ‘Applicability of the principle of respect for autonomy: the perspective of Turkey’, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 33 (2007), 627-630

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

norms are found to be rewarding and compatible with one's self-respect. Those who identify as allocentric types, for instance, are often found to be less lonely, have more social support, and base their self-esteem on "getting along"<sup>502</sup>. In this fashion, it seems possible in some cases for two individuals of the same external position to be more or less autonomous than the other depending on their psychological states. Without being sensitive to internal narratives about decision-making, I believe Oshana's view risks being paternalistic, according autonomy mostly to individuals who exhibit self-sufficiency in an individualistic sense.

We can recognize the general fact that social relationships are not perfectly equal. It seems more plausible to claim that all relationships hold potential to cultivate *or* curtail autonomy to various degrees. Some of our most important, meaningful, and intimate ties may at the same time be the source of constraint – constraint which we ought to take as an autonomy-compatible part of our life experiences given the inescapably mixed nature of our social ties. But this will be a problem for Oshana's account to the extent that dissonant or imperfectly equal relationships do not promote the kind of global independence and control required for self-governance. Agents under such conditions would be regarded as non-autonomous regardless of whether it is a result of gendered oppression, collectivism, or some other reason. The problem is that Oshana's account is open to the charge of perfectionism this way: attaining autonomy, under Oshana's framework, seems to require that one be part of a perfectly egalitarian network of non-interventionist social relationships to qualify for autonomy. Because this position is virtually impossible, the bar seems to be set too high, making it difficult for most agents to be autonomous.

#### **7.4.4 The Stay-at-home Dad**

Oshana admits that a general objection levelled at her view has to do with how the social-relational account "expects people to possess control of a sort that is impossible to satisfy"<sup>503</sup>. She is, however, hesitant to concede the point too much. In her response to the criticism, she provides another example:

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<sup>502</sup> Matsumoto, D. and Kupperbusch, C., 'Idiocentric and allocentric differences in emotional expression, experience, and the coherence between expression and experience.' *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 4 (2001), 113-131

<sup>503</sup> Marina Oshana, 'Is Social-Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal?', in *Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression*, ed. By Marina Oshana (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), p. 14.

“Suppose Rahm chooses to be a stay at home dad rather than a wall street financial consultant, with the result that he is now dependent on his partner for financial security. But support, too, that Rahm’s role as stay-at-home dad, subjectively valued though it may be, yields the result that he has little *de facto* power and authority over discretionary spending of money and leisure time. As a result, he would fail to be autonomous in the sense I maintain amounts to self-determination.”<sup>504</sup>

Her view is that financial insecurity puts the Rahm in a position where he will not be able to challenge ‘potential encroachments’ from those who have the ability to overpower him, which will stunt any ability the individual has to determine their life course. To maintain that this stay at home dad is non-autonomous would therefore not be an unreasonable judgment to make. Oshana does not raise the question of the psychological states – such as reasons, desires, and attitudes – underlying Rahm’s individual choice to be a stay at home dad rather than a ‘wall street financial consultant’, focusing rather on the aspect of ‘little *de facto* power’ that follows this choice.

It does not seem to me, however, that this counterpoint is particularly instructive in buttressing her view. Rahm’s case does not particularly offend any of Oshana’s conditions of autonomy. To start, the case seems compatible with critical reflection and procedural independence. Moreover, it is not clear that he does not have access to a relevant range of options – going from being a wall street financial broker to stay at home dad hardly seems representative of a case where the agent could not but help be bound to a domestic life. And aside from financial dependence, it is not at all clear that he lacks social-relational security either.

Something which might make a difference in the determination of autonomy for Rahm, I think, would be Rahm’s self-regarding stance with regard to his decision. This is something my multidimensional view would allow us to consider. So I will focus here especially on the dimension of self-authorization. Diana Tietjens Meyers points out that when people criticize or hold the general character of ‘henpecked husband’ in pity or contempt, it often has to do with the way that such a figure is perceived as violating certain norms of masculinity by failing to dominate his wife. Meyers says, however, that if anything should

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

convince us that a ‘henpecked husband’ has self-respect, it should be by looking at the evidence that he really believes men should share domestic chores, that he spurns “prevalent masculine modalities” and other such instances that reveal he is not “playing patsy”<sup>505</sup> to his wife. Contrary to the view that a henpecked husband typically fails to be self-respecting, she says that it may be a matter of preserving self-respect for a man to repudiate certain norms of masculinity once he is disillusioned with them.

Now if there is anything that should cast into doubt that Rahm is sufficiently self-authorizing, it would probably hinge on the question of Rahm’s own attitudes about his circumstances. We have little reason to doubt that he is self-authorized in his decision to be a stay at home dad, unless it turns out that he holds himself in self-contempt. But he certainly does not seem to be an analogue of the stereotypical Deferential Wife, who is often characterized as lacking in self-respect. It is perfectly plausible to imagine that Rahm just does not value having a high income nearly as much as he would being a stay at home dad and spending time with his child, given that his partner can support them financially. Given that this decision-making background exhibits the kind of self-accountability and self-respect we would expect of a self-authorizing individual, he appears internally to satisfy the relevant criteria for autonomy. To the extent that this can be true of the case, it does not seem like there is special reason to be suspicious of Rahm’s autonomy – but certainly we should be looking at his self-authorization to confirm this if and when the question arises, rather than evaluating his case only on his de facto control. It seems then that my approach allows for a significant nuance of the case to be captured, whereas Oshana’s analysis suggests rather damningly that Rahm could only be properly autonomous if he did not eschew financial independence and self-sufficiency.

#### **7.4.5 The Subservient Worker**

We’ve surveyed that Oshana’s view poses a perfectionist problem in regard to the kinds of social relations in which any agent can find themselves to count as autonomous: it seems that individuals who strongly prefer in-group norms and individuals who assent to being dependent on their partners may turn out not to be autonomous. The final example I

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<sup>505</sup> Diana T. Meyers, ‘Self-Respect and Autonomy’, in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect* ed. By Robin Dillon (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 228.

present will make clear that the problem applies not only with reference to individual personal leanings, but rather is a problem by default for many ordinary roles in society.

James Rocha raises a point about how on Oshana's account ordinary workers' lives would count as non-autonomous since many careers involve subservience in the form of having to follow orders, oversight, "preponderance of mindless tasks that the agent has no independent reason to perform"<sup>506</sup>, and so on. These remove the day-to-day control for the life of the worker. Because Oshana's account requires avoidance of "impediments on the agent's ability to control her actions"<sup>507</sup> – the subservient worker would not count as autonomous because they do not seem to have the kind of control necessary for Oshana's ideal while on the job<sup>508</sup>. Rocha believes a view of autonomy that treats all subservient workers similarly would miss out on "key differences to whether they sufficiently control their lives, *on their terms*"<sup>509</sup>. Though Oshana does not believe Rocha's characterization of the subservient worker is true of the ordinary worker, she does concede that she has no problem with asserting that such lives are non-autonomous if such lives really do feature this significant lack of self-governance.

Yet this is counterintuitive – it seems to me a workaholic who is passionate about their job and feels aligned with its demands is more autonomous than one who resents their role. For James Rocha the solution is to turn to a 'welfare' view of autonomy, whereby agents can "...use their happiness as a metric to determine whether subservience hinders their autonomy"<sup>510</sup>. What this means is that if the agent is happy with subservience, it becomes amenable to autonomy, and we can avoid the problem of restricting subservient workers from counting as autonomous. What Rocha means by 'happiness' is fairly open-ended. He says that it could be pleasure-based, but that agents may set other, more complex standards for their own welfare, such as "loving standards, selfless standards, ascetic standards"<sup>511</sup>. All of these standards determine the kinds of limiting or restrictive commitments it is appropriate for an agent to take on. One's choice of career determines where one should be Monday

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<sup>506</sup> James Rocha, Autonomy Within Subservient Careers, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 14 (2011), 313-328 (p. 315).

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

through Friday, a marriage determines “the very methodology for making future decisions (jointly)”<sup>512</sup>, and so on.

I think he is right to draw attention to one way that the focus of autonomy could be shifted to balance out the externalist view – as by evaluating the agent’s own conception of the good. I refrain from adopting Rocha’s terminology, because I find ‘happiness’ to be slightly misleading. If it is meant in an open-ended way, I believe my dimensions of self-governance and self-authorization already accounts for what he means by agents’ self-legislated standards. On my account of self-governance, recall, authenticity conditions are taken to have a limited usefulness in determining how the agent positions themselves with respect to their decisions. Competence conditions refer to the coordinated exercise of skills that relate to autonomy on different levels: at the minimum, competence potentiates autonomy, and in the stronger sense they relate to autonomy as skills that are meaningful or purposive for the agent. Taken together, these two parts of self-governance seem able to account for what is going on with the subservient worker without being as restrictive as Oshana, or resorting to Rocha’s point about ‘happiness’. That is, it may constitute a part of a worker’s autonomy that they can verify their endorsement or preference of their choices with respect to some authenticity condition; furthermore, that they find some purposiveness or meaning in the set of skills they are engaged in may contribute to their being ‘autonomous’ in a job. There is no requirement that one fully identify with their work or derive happiness from it: some people find themselves with the work they do because it was the only opening available to them at the time, or it is the only way they can pay off a debt, and so on. Such reasons don’t seem like complex self-chosen ascetic reasons or preferences related to personal welfare in the way Rocha suggests; they seem to be of a more fortuitous type than preferences related to personal welfare.

The self-authorization dimension of my account allows for agents to adopt subservient careers. It is in principle compatible with their having accountability – that is, the agent’s justifications matter, such that it is possible for an agent to explain why they are in some role or position *in spite of* the subservience and dissatisfaction attached, and so on. And it is compatible with their having self-respect, since being subservient within the bounds of one’s career, is a negotiated state rather than one of slavery. It also seems that the fact agents

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.



take pride in whatever it is they do also denote a kind of self-respect. This condition does, of course, exclude some workplace environments from being compatible with the self-authorization aspect of autonomy, such as ones that tolerate harassment or foster intimidation. Regardless, my view is in theory compatible with individual psychological states that denote ‘subservient’ leanings, and this allows for my account to not be exclusive in the way Oshana’s is.

#### 7.4.6 The Conscientious Objector

In this next example, Oshana asks us to consider the conscientious objector (CO), who “chooses prison rather than denounce his pacifistic principles”<sup>513</sup>. As in previous cases, we may assume that the agent is sufficiently authentic and procedurally independent with respect to this decision. According to Oshana, incarceration means that the CO cannot control his life, since it is a state of affairs that “renders him dependent on the judgment and will of others for the satisfaction of his objectives and for the direction of his life”<sup>514</sup>. The CO ought to thereby be ascribed non-autonomous.

This is an interesting case because it seems there are several ways that a CO might have their autonomy diminished here. The aspect Oshana focuses on is the physical constraint of incarceration. But doing the converse – denouncing their principles – might also constitute a loss of autonomy, albeit of a different sort. Take the predicament of the CO in 1916 Britain. At the time, being a CO was berated, with much of the media depictions lambasting COs as lazy, incapable of being ‘real men’, and in violation of gender norms (they were called ‘sissies’)<sup>515</sup>. But it would be a loss rather than a victory to escape such ostracization by denouncing one’s self-authorizing principles in the process. As such, the CO is in a double bind: he is guilty if he shares in the ‘soldiers’ ordeal’<sup>516</sup>, and guilty if he does not. So both the case in which the CO is incarcerated but does not denounce their principles, and the case in which the CO escapes incarceration but does denounce them, are instances of imperfect or partial autonomy. At the same time, unfree as COs were in imprisonment, many were proactive even in their incarceration and the “pressures and hardships strengthened their

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<sup>513</sup> Oshana, ‘Personal Autonomy and Society’, p. 91.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Charlotte Tomlinson, *First World War Attitudes to Conscientious Objectors*, English Heritage <<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richmond-castle/history/attitudes-to-cos/>>

<sup>516</sup> Margaret Brooks, *Conscientious Objectors in their own words*, Imperial War Museums (2018), <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/conscientious-objectors-in-their-own-words>>

resolve”<sup>517</sup>. There is something to be said about autonomy relative to the indefatigability of those who did stand up for their values in spite of the fulmination they faced – it seems that these are qualities we can take as markers of self-authorization. Neither the damage to autonomy by denunciation or the possibility of autonomy under circumstances of constraint are accounted for on Oshana’s view.

This leads us to a related objection. The objection is that her view cannot explain the “dissimilarity between the oppressed who submit to their oppression and persons who vigorously struggle against it”<sup>518</sup>. As Robert Noggle says, a limitation of Oshana’s view is that resisters and collaborators get grouped into the same category. He points out that because on Oshana’s account agents lack autonomy if they are in fact oppressed, the resistor cannot be considered autonomous, “no matter how carefully lifelong resistance to oppression might be planned...or how tenaciously her mission of resistance might be pursued in the face of formidable obstacles”<sup>519</sup>.

To this critique, Oshana insists that social reformers such as Tubman, Mandela, and King were willing to put everything on the line precisely because they were “acutely aware of something lacking in their lives and in the lives of ordinary people on whose behalf they fought”<sup>520</sup>. As social reformers, according to Oshana, they are in some sense compelled to be resisters – they are not social reformers because it was the life they actually wanted to lead. I take her to mean that resistance in this instance is a mode of self-defence that is hardly appropriate to call autonomous. At the same time, however, it does not seem fair to say social reformers cannot actively ‘choose’ their mode of life; this view victimizes social reformers as individuals bound up in a tragic and inevitable loss of agency. Oshana’s view contains the counterintuitive implication that lives set in motion by constraint cannot at all be legitimated by the individual. That is not to say, of course, that she believes they lacked a voice – the problem is more that “they lacked a legal right and genuine opportunity to make their voices heard”<sup>521</sup>. Individuals like King and Mandela thus fell short of the conditions of the social-relational security that their white counterparts had, and if they did not fail as self-

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Oshana, ‘Is Social-Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal?’, p. 8.

<sup>519</sup> Robert Noggle, ‘Book Review: Marina Oshana, Personal Autonomy in Society’, *J Value Inquiry*, 45 (2011), 233–238, (p. 238).

<sup>520</sup> Oshana, ‘Is Social-Relational Autonomy a Plausible Ideal?’, p. 9.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

determining agents, it was largely due to the fact that they had social support. But according to Oshana the success of these ‘moral paragons’ should be treated as exceptional rather than standard.

She admits, however, that even if she is correct that the effort it takes to combat oppression is costly to autonomy, she is hesitant to not ascribe autonomy to these persons. Indeed, they seem to represent exemplars rather than failures of autonomy. She says that “...with little outside assistance, these persons have initiated and presided over actions expressly intended to foster conditions that permit human agency to flourish. Despite Jim Crow, African Americans established schools, social clubs, unions, newspapers, churches, and so on, the legacy of which continues to shape American culture today.”<sup>522</sup> I interpret this to mean that there is something praiseworthy about individuals under oppression who attempt to bring about conditions that will in fact cultivate conditions of meaningful external control. My sense is that her hesitation in labelling such individuals non-autonomous is in fact connected to the intuition that social reformers are not only praiseworthy in the moral sense, but that their very striving toward ends that aim to bring about better conditions for autonomy can themselves be regarded as a part of autonomous expression. I’m not claiming that this is exactly what she meant by her comment, but it does seem suggestive of the possibility that internal psychological states – in this case, the social reformers attitudes – have a greater constitutive role for autonomy than she has been allowing for in most of her other examples. Still, Oshana does not take this suggestion up fully - she emphasizes that it is more that King gained autonomy “only when national and international circumstances forced a seismic shift in attention to the movement he represented.”<sup>523</sup> Ultimately, she says that it may be possible for a person to be self-determining under oppression if the circumstances “preserve an adequate degree of authority over affairs in those realms that are of consequence”<sup>524</sup>, which again implies a notion of *internal* normative authority.

A problem with her response to the criticism that her account doesn’t distinguish between colluders and resisters is that she seems to veer back and forth between two renditions of her account. On the one hand, she tries to defend her position by reasserting her radically relational view. Now if her radically relational interpretation is the tool she really

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

intends to use against the criticism, then she must concede the point - she is committed to saying that there is little that actually distinguishes the autonomy of someone who actively resists their oppression and someone who (to put it crudely) internalizes or accepts it. Yet she admitted to being reluctant to rule the case of social reformers as cases of non-autonomy. She seemed to be hinting at the notion that standing up to one's principles in adversity counts for something; and this facet of her response exhibits a much less radically relational analysis. On this weaker view, it is possible to meaningfully extrapolate autonomy from the individual's internal configuration of values, and that there *is* something in the content of one's internal psychology that denotes autonomy (like the assertion of morally noble or conscientious objectives). But if this was meant to allay the critique, then it is puzzling that she hasn't explained more precisely *how* she imagines the psychology of the agent affects their autonomous status. It is all the more puzzling as it isn't obvious that this less radical interpretation couldn't be compatible with a social-relational view of autonomy. Why not simply say that social reformers are *partially* autonomous, to the extent that they do fulfil the internalist's conditions, rather than completely non-autonomous?

#### 7.4.7 The Monk

Is a monk autonomous? Oshana claims that "it is possible to relinquish one's autonomous condition without losing authority over that condition"<sup>525</sup>. This is because, according to Oshana, "unlike the slave, the monk has consented to a condition that guarantees him ultimate authority over himself on a yearly basis"<sup>526</sup>, so is distinguished from the slave, who does not have even this aspect of sovereignty. Still, she points out, that the monk can choose to revise this decision yearly does not take away from the fact that "his monastic superiors preserve authority in the interim". But the monk, at least, can 'become' self-governing by 'revoking' his decision to be subservient, which puts him on a different social position to the slave. I am not convinced this is a satisfactory explanation of the difference between Oshana's voluntary slave and the monk. She herself mentions that she is interested in the 'global' idea of autonomy – that is, whether one is an autonomous person – and not in whether people have additive episodes of autonomy. In this case the yearly right to revoke the decision to be subservient doesn't indicate autonomy overall, since most days of the year this is not a decision that is an option for the agent. It seems peculiar, too, that she is willing

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<sup>525</sup> Oshana, 'Personal Autonomy and Society', p. 92.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

to concede that the monk retains autonomy but treated other cases short of slavery much more strictly (e.g. the subservient woman). Perhaps the intuitions differ in each case because of the features Oshana mentions, like a yearly right to revoke submission. But does the subservient wife not *technically* have the option to leave, or make an effort to change the dynamic of her relationship with her husband? What about the conscientious objector – did he not have the *prudential* choice to escape incarceration by denouncing the principles that served as ‘reasons’ for arrest? The point is that these ‘options’ are often made very difficult, not that they aren’t available at all. Why should the same not apply in the monk’s case?

The explanation from the social-relational perspective here may be that what is at stake for the monk is not the same as what is at stake for the subservient woman, for instance. She might raise the issue of it being difficult for the subservient woman to leave – perhaps she does not have the social support or economic resources to adjust to a life outside that of her marriage. But I am not convinced that these variations in the case have, so far, demonstrated plausible reasons, from her social-relational point of view, to treat the cases as different. For instance, that the monk can technically opt-out might mean very little if, say, after many years accustomed to this particular way of life, and having given up material comforts on the outside, life beyond monkhood is going to be a difficult adjustment. For instance, if they don’t have a strong support system on the outside, they don’t have enough financial resources to comfortably start anew, and so on, the monk too is in the same predicament as some of these other cases.

I think a better route would have been to go with a softer interpretation of the social-relational view, and consider whether the agent’s own perspective counts for anything we can accept. We would have to ask questions around the issue of whether there is something in the agent’s psychological tendency to aim to be a monk that is unacceptable for its subservient implications in the same way that it is unacceptable for a voluntary slave to want to be subservient, and *why*. This line of questioning, it seems, will illuminate differences in psychological self-regarding attitudes and in objectives between cases, alongside the normative and external considerations around the matter. Just as I suggested in an earlier section that we may distinguish the autonomous status of a slave from a marine, I believe the same can be done in the monk’s case; and to make this distinction requires that we look ‘inside’ the agent – their relevant internal capacities to set objectives and make decisions, and

their self-regarding attitudes in so doing.

## 7.5 Conclusion

Oshana's social-relational framework is useful for helping us to think about autonomy in cases where the agent's social standing leaves them constrained in significant ways. Her view offers us a way to countervail the need to speculate about an agent's psychology, which offsets the major problem that internalist accounts are faced with in relation to the question of how we can analyse autonomy in cases of extreme external constraint that is voluntarily and freely chosen by the individual agent. As Oshana has sketched out, often the key concern in any case with regards to autonomy is relies on the question of whether some agent *is* subservient or constrained, not *why* or *how* they are.

However, as we've seen above, Oshana's view as it stands tends to be overtly focused on external considerations about the agent's social environment without according enough importance to internalist considerations where they are relevant. This is an effect of her unitary focus on social-relational factors, despite including psychological considerations in her theory. The way she analyses her own case studies – the voluntary slave, the subservient woman, the conscientious objector, and the monk – exhibit ways that her account is restrictive, and open to a charge of perfectionism about independent control. It seems that despite her social view of autonomy being touted as one compatible with the social embeddedness of individuals, it is only really compatible with a vision of a society in which inequities in *de facto* control are perfectly compensated. One must be at a perfect distance from possible conflict, problematic dependence, pressure, intervention by others, and so on. This view fails to reflect the real, *imperfect* relationships that characterize most ordinary agents' lives. I hope to have shown, in each case, that the virtue of my own multifaceted view to autonomy is that it has the explanatory resources to capture Oshana's externalist considerations, without offering explanations of autonomy that turn out to be too restrictive or externalist at the expense of other, more internal considerations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I conceptualized autonomy as a multidimensionally constituted concept and argued that this is a robust view and way of thinking about autonomy. In Chapter One, I anticipated the pragmatic benefits of such an approach by applying my framework to hard cases of autonomy. By analyzing and being able to explain these cases in a nuanced way, I was able to demonstrate that it benefits us to treat autonomy as a multidimensional concept. In Chapter Two, I set out to define the feminist values of autonomy, to defend the idea of autonomy from feminist skepticism about the concept, and offer a kind of guideline of feminist commitments that a feminist-minded theory of autonomy ought to follow. I believe outlining feminist desiderata set a standard that my own view could follow, and also helped me bring attention to some of the features we should be looking to evaluate in other theories of autonomy. In Chapter Three, I compared two multidimensional approaches – Suzy Killmister’s and Catriona Mackenzie’s approach – and argued that the structure of Mackenzie’s approach was more appealing for my purposes due to its hybrid nature.

In Chapter Four, then, I subsumed much of Mackenzie’s multidimensional theory but expanded upon it to work out some of its details. The account I come up with in Chapter Four is this: for one to satisfy the self-determination dimension, one must be accorded certain basic freedoms and opportunities compatible with non-domination. Where I diverged from Mackenzie on this dimension is with regard to permissiveness about the uptake of freedoms and opportunities: that is, while agents have a claim to self-determination, I do not claim that self-determination has to be exercised in a ‘valuable’ way. I believe my own amendment of the view, then, gets closer to satisfying the condition of moral neutrality and inclusivity suggested in Chapter Two as a feminist commitment. Next, I adopt the dimension of self-governance, which involves both authenticity (the agent’s ‘true self’) and competence (autonomy-conducive skills or abilities). Unlike Mackenzie’s view, however, I place less priority on the authenticity condition of self-governance, taking a more flexible view and allowing for us not to commit to any particular account of authenticity. Furthermore, I diverged from Mackenzie’s view of competence, which she related to aspects of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, and suggested different ways that the idea of competencies can be related to autonomy. For the dimension of self-authorization, which for Mackenzie involved accountability and ‘self-evaluative’ attitudes like self-respect, self-esteem, and self-trust, I

adopted the basics of the approach but fleshed out their details. Finally, I added social recognition as a standalone dimension of autonomy that has implications for all three of the elements just mentioned. I believe this revised approach, which I call a hybrid multidimensional approach, enhances and builds on Mackenzie's three-dimensional theory. I hope my fleshing out of this account showed that it is a robust theory of autonomy by itself, but also one with clear advantages as a feminist account as well.

Moving onto Part Two of my thesis, I critiqued and compared my approach to Natalie Stoljar's normative competence account in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I did the same with Andrea Westlund's account of autonomy as dialogical answerability. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I looked at Marina Oshana's social-relational approach to autonomy. In all of these comparative analyses, I showed that my multidimensional framework stood in advantage, as my view was able to overcome many of the problems attached to these theories. As such, my view is able to directly and successfully address issues relevant to feminist theories of autonomy, making my multidimensional view one that meaningfully competes with existing frameworks.



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